THE FRANCISCANS

FATHER JAMES, O.S.F.C.

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THE FRANCISCANS

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THE FRANCISCANS

By

FATHER JAMES

O. S. F. C.

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With an Introduction by

FR. THOMAS PLASSMANN, O.F.M.

Bonebrake Theological Seminary

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is a tendency among the lovers and admirers of St. Francis to overestimate the influence which his natural environments exercised upon his charming personality, his ardent temperament and his rapturous love of God and things divine. True, the chivalrous spirit of his day, the blue sky and the birds and flowers and streams of the Assisian valley, the gentle piety of Pica and Bernardone's fiery enthusiasm for romantic Provence are mirrored with rare brilliancy in the keenly sensitve soul of young Francesco, but there is a secret force, a vitalizing power "which lieth hid within," and which had its source not indeed among the verdant hills of Umbria, but rather upon "the eternal hills" of God. As St. Paul puts it: "To them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints" (Rom. viii 28). Neither critic nor psychologist may venture to analyze and account for all those delicate processes which concur in the making of God's saints. And when all is said and done, and when the balance is struck by those who have tried to walk the road that Francis walked, the verdict is simply this: How powerful was the grace that vitalized his being and how beautiful the faith that nourished him.

And yet, this world-wide admiration for the Poverello may be hailed as an indication that our nat-

uralistic age has salvaged a fair amount of man's primitive heritage, of that religious, nay mystical appreciation which is congenital even to our fallen nature. For though the crowd may boastfully disavow all faith in both Adam and the Fall, yet they cannot help but hearken avidly to the voice of Francis that sings to them of days long forgotten, like unto an echo from "the garden of pleasure" where the Lord God was wont to walk among his children "at the afternoon air." But here again they stop and stumble. They love to gaze upon the saint as he preaches to the birds and gently holds the paw of Brother Wolf. They even watch him eagerly as he bends in silent adoration before the lowly crib at Greccio. But they would feign turn away when he kisses the leper's wound. They cast a pitiful look upon him as he clasps his arms around the Saviour on the Cross. They feel indignant as he lingers for hours with outstretched arms before the little tabernacle at Portiuncula, and they are horrified to see him prostrate before the priests of the Church, nay before the Lord Pope of Rome who gives solemn approval to the Rule of the Friars Minors.

Francis sees no such incongruities. Intuitively he comprehends "what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth" of God's work. And his "single eye" and glowing heart instantly detect the focal point in this grand and colorful picture. For him to know is to love, and to love is to do. And so he loves the starry sky, "for it is the throne of God"; he loves the earth, "for it is his footstool"; he loves Jerusalem, the Holy Roman Catholic Church, "for it is the city of the great king," and he clings to the King, whether

he be in swaddling clothes, or in the sacred host, on the cross, or in a leper's garb. To him it is all perfect order, "sweetness of body and soul" and harmony divine. And thus with the simplicity of a child, with a directness and an ardour unsurpassed, with a submission that is at once tender, docile and literal, St. Francis stands before this age as a living proof of the divinity of our Faith, of Mother Church—"a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v 27).

We heartily welcome the present volume which was written by one whose calling, life and attainments have eminently qualified him to set before the world a true picture of St. Francis and Franciscanism. May the scholarly and inspiring lines of our Confrère reap a rich and lasting harvest.

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O.F.M.

St. Bonaventure, N. Y.
Sept. 17, 1930.

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THE FRANCISCANS

I

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI: FOUNDER

1. *Cult of St. Francis.*

That there is a modern cult of St. Francis of Assisi is of common knowledge. He has become the centre of sympathies that know no frontier. He is literally Everybody's St. Francis.

That this universal interest in the Poor Little Man of Assisi is calculated to ennoble the lives of men can scarcely be doubted. His very human qualities, his gentleness, his love of all things great and small, the poetry of his life, are refining influences on those who know him. Whether, for all that, there has been a better appreciation of the real inner spirit of the Saint may well be questioned.

It is so easy to deceive ourselves. The joy and gaiety, the romantic *abandon* and care-free chivalry of Francis and his "Knights of the Round Table," as he called his followers, may so fill our eyes that we may not see beyond the outward show of things.

Only those who have some idea of the great difficulties of drama can appreciate the care with which the very smallest scene is enacted upon the stage. They

alone surmise the immense labour that disguises itself before our eyes as supreme facility.

It is very much the same with the life of St. Francis and his followers. If we are to grasp the real drama of his life, we must know his real character as it was finally formed and shaped by sanctity—we must have some idea of the *real* St. Francis. Only in that way can we appraise the true Franciscan spirit, or recognise the Franciscan contribution to the great symphony of the Church's spirituality.

The voices of different saints blend harmoniously in a common spirituality. They do not fuse, however; each one retains its proper timbre and tone-colour. The sanctity of a St. Francis of Assisi is not that of a St. Benedict or a St. Ignatius. It is simply that of Francis himself.

And yet, is there not a common sanctity in the Church of God? Assuredly. There is essentially only one holiness and one ideal of holiness. St. Paul indicates it pithily when he says "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." But that does not exclude diversity. The Christ-life within the soul receives different expressions in the lives of different saints. Grace does not destroy, it simply perfects nature. Sanctity is genius in holiness. Essentially the same in all, it allows of self-expression, characteristic of each. The bodying forth of holiness in lives will vary from saint to saint. Shelley's image of life has a deep significance when we apply it to the ideals and lives of different saints. They may well be likened to the "dome of many-coloured glass" which "stains the white radiance of eternity." The white light of sanctity is reflected prismatically.

It is coloured and diversified in the lives of different saints.[1]

We see at once the dangér of an Everybody's St. Francis. Everybody's interest may be merely selective, taking what it pleases, and creating a Francis to its own particular liking. The sanctity of St. Francis is particularly enhanced by the colouring of his richly-endowed human personality. Men may be easily charmed by the hue and tint of his natural temperament and forget to notice that it is transfused by the subtle white light of sanctity.

In the pages which follow the *real* St. Francis is above and beyond all a saint of God. We recognise that there is some light within him which exalts his whole being beyond mere human dimensions, flows through his love of men and of Nature, and gives superhuman force and beauty to his every action. The very poetry of his life has more than human soul in it. There is more in the leper's kiss that marked a decisive turning-point in the Saint's evolution than mere humanity at its highest; there is more in that "sweetness of soul and body" he then experienced than a mere satisfaction over self-conquest. His impulse to kiss a leper came from some other source; the leper himself formed part of a wider vision than is given to mortal eye, of itself, to see.

The human soul of Francis was not the only vital force in his life. There was something greater, something that invested it with divine dignity, something

[1] I should like to say immediately that I have utilised for the present essay certain articles of mine which have appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, the *Capuchin Annual* (1930) and *Orate Fratres*, Vols. I, II and III.

ineffably intimate which filled it with light and life. This second soul, so to speak, was the divine life within his soul, a life that ever seeks its own level—Christ, from whom it came. In the leper's embrace we see the Spirit of Christ within the soul of Francis going out impulsively to Christ Himself, of whom poor suffering and miserable humanity is the most striking symbol.

It is this life, this supernatural life within the soul of Francis, which transfuses his entire life with a splendour that has no source on earth—it is the hidden sun that flows over the turrets of his soul, investing his whole person and action with a divine light.

Invested with that light, St. Francis remains himself. He is strikingly personal in his life of sanctity. His artistic temperament gives a poetic rendering of the normal holiness of the Church. His ideal of sanctity bears the impress of his natural character and temperament. What that particular ideal of holiness was, we shall endeavour to elucidate. In this way we shall have some idea of that Franciscan spirit which he bequeathed to those who were to follow him. These followers, of course, are simply the Franciscans as we know them. Sometimes the universal cult of St. Francis has been unkind to the Franciscans.

St. Francis stands out in bold relief in popular esteem. Gradually he was detached from the epoch in which he arose, even from the Church in which he lived, moved, and had his being. For some he was the Messiah sent by God to restore the Church; for others he represented an attempt to break away from institutional religion of every kind. With this double sunder-

ing of the bonds that bind Francis to his epoch and to the Church, it was but natural to expect that men would so enhance the solitariness of his life and personality that his connection with the Franciscans would in time be somewhat obscured. Because the declining years of the Saint were saddened by certain developments within the Order, some writers have taken pleasure in exalting an almost solitary Francis and his first companions at the cost of the great body of Franciscans founded by him.

If we are to have something like an adequate idea, therefore, of the real St. Francis of Assisi, and of his lasting contribution to the spirituality of the Church, we must find for him a true perspective in his triple relation to his epoch, to the Church, and to the Franciscans, that body of men which, down through the ages, represents humanity's attempt to live the Franciscan life.

2. *Life and Personality.*

St. Francis was born into a world that was just giving strong signs of a somewhat turbulent awakening. The place of his birth was Assisi, that little town which looks down from its height on the slope of Monte Subasio and seems so indifferent to the weary traveller who is in search of it. It was towards the end of the twelfth century, in 1182, that a certain Pica, wife of the merchant Pietro Bernardone, gave birth to Francis.

The reform of the Church undertaken by Pope Gregory VII had not cleared the field of all abuses; unmistakable moral evil still existed. But Christian

consciousness was restive; reform was in the air. Individual reformers appeared, and not infrequently ran their course to exaggeration and heresy. Some struck out in open opposition to the Church. Her wealth, and the use of it made by individual members, evoked angry protests. The Waldenses followed in the wake of Peter of Lyons, boldly preaching poverty and other things less agreeable to the Church. Cathari and Albigenses appeared, only to show to what extent men's minds were poisoned by the pessimistic doctrines of Manichæanism. Away up in the mountains of Calabria the celebrated Joachim of Fiore (1168-1202) was writing his epoch-making review of all history, and prophesying the near approach of antiChrist.

The great struggle of the Church and the Empire was still going on. And within the broader struggle there were minor ripples on the surface of society. Towns were growing up. Italy was a surging sea of rising republics, all of which were guarding their independence with a jealous eye, eager, if so it might be, to extend their power and prestige. The bonds of feudalism were loosening, for with the growth of the towns a new and important class, the merchants, was making its influence felt. These important men, the merchants, were chafing under the power of feudal lords. In Assisi open conflict flared out between them. Perugia had been looking on, and then suddenly sided with the feudal lords. There was a battle. Assisi was defeated. Among the prisoners taken was the merchant's son, Francis. That was the first association of our Saint with the history of Assisi.

He was then almost twenty years of age. He was

rather a well-known figure in his native town. The neighbours said he lived more like a prince than a merchant, but they looked lightly on his youthful frolics and expensive taste, for he was kind and generous to the poor. He was a natural leader. In the merry crowd of young Italians who roused the little town with strains of music and of song Francis stood out, pre-eminent. He had a marked affection for display in dress, and in his partiality for song and music the romantic temperament of his mother, Pica, was showing itself.

His first biographer, Celano, has left us a portrait of Francis as he was in later years. We may project it back into those days when as yet the fire of divine love had not enveloped him. We can surmise from it something of that natural temperament and character which Francis brought to sanctity.

"In stature he was a little above the middle size; his head was round and not too large, his forehead small and even; his eyes were of medium size, black and truthful; black hair, straight eyebrows, a fine nose, even and straight, ears erect and small, and flat temples—such was the upper part of his countenance; his voice was vehement, sweet, clear, and sonorous; his teeth were closely set, even, white; his lips small and thin; his slender neck was set on square shoulders, and his short arms ended in small hands with long fingers, the nails of which were projecting; his legs were slender and his feet small; his skin was delicate and he was very thin. . ."

Every word of this description expresses that almost

feminine sensibility and refinement that was part of the Saint's natural character. He was too much refined to be gross, and his presence was enough to put a curb on licentious tongues.

But Francis was ambitious; his soul was stretching out beyond the confines of Assisi with its petty amusements, but as yet he knew not on what he would fasten to give him satisfaction for the aspirations of his soul. The desire of glory, which led him to throw in his lot with Assisi against Perugia, led him later to set out to fight for the Pope. This time something more serious than mere defeat stayed his course. It was the voice of God in a dream, telling him to return to Assisi.

For some time back Francis had not been happy in his life. On his first return after imprisonment he had fallen ill, and illness revealed much to him. After it, everything seemed changed; his amusements became distasteful, and frequently he found himself considering what God required of him. At Spoleto he asked St. Paul's question of God, and God revealed to him that it was at Assisi that he would discover his vocation.

As the outward life made less claims on him, his inner life was growing; in solitude and in lonely places around Assisi he prayed and waited. Then suddenly when all seemed dark, a new light shone upon his mind. What that light was may be surmised from the fact that the erstwhile gay companion of the young men of Assisi was seen to weep copiously on the roads about the town. "I weep," said Francis, "for the Passion of Jesus Christ, my Master, for whom I ought not to be ashamed to weep unto the end of time."

Francis had discovered God in Jesus Christ, and

Christ, his Master, he had found upon the Cross. He became a lover of the Crucified, and gazed on that Figure dying of love for men until the vision of Christ filled his mind. A new light shone on men, and he was beginning to see in them many distorted images of Christ, the Beloved.[1]

Soon his newly acquired vision of the suffering Christ was put to the test: a leper stood before him. His whole being revolted at the sight; his horror of lepers came back with a rush upon him, and he almost failed. Yet, by God's grace he did not: he gave an alms, he actually kissed the corrupted hand of the leper. It was a significant event in the life of Francis, to which he reverted when he wrote his Testament.

> "For a while I was in sin, it seemed to me too bitter a thing to see lepers, but the Lord Himself led me amongst them, and I showed compassion to them. And what before had seemed bitter was changed into sweetness of soul and body." [2]

From that day there is but one word to express the history of St. Francis: he was *transformed* gradually into Jesus, until on Mount Alverna his body bore the marks of Christ Crucified.

His vocation took precise form after two years of a hermit's life of penance. It took place in this way:

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[1] For a more detailed account of the genesis of St. Francis's vocation permit me to refer the reader to my book, *Where is Thy God?* Sands & Co., pp. 84 ff.

[2] The reader will find the known writings of St. Francis in an attractive little volume edited by Most Rev. Dr. Paschal Robinson, O.F.M., entitled *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi.* The Dolphin Press.

Francis was at Mass one morning when he heard the gospel of St. Matthew read, where it is said "Do not possess gold, nor silver, nor money in your purses: nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a staff." When the priest had explained its meaning, Francis, with that quick decision which was characteristic of him, saw that here at last was the ideal life that was drawing him. He threw aside his hermit's garments, he cast away the staff he had with him, took off his shoes, and set out to preach the Gospel.

The Gospel became his simple rule of life, and a full and integral imitation of Christ his ideal. Love of Christ was the inspiring force of such a life. It was the vision of Christ upon the Cross that was at the back of the Poverello's imitation of Christ. It was this vision that determined his relation to all things.

In his cult of poverty we see his personality finding its own proper self-expression. After that memorable day when he renounced his earthly father before the Bishop of Assisi, he found that he had gained perfect freedom of soul. Once he was convinced of the spiritual significance of poverty, his poetic instinct realised it in the form of the Lady Poverty of whom he became enamoured. To read the *Sacrum Commercium* is to obtain a glimpse of the poetic beauty of his conception. In it we have, as in the *Fioretti*,[1] the idyllic simplicity,

[1] The *Fioretti*, or *Little Flowers*, of St. Francis, dating back to the first half of the fourteenth century, may well be ranked as one of the most typically Franciscan pieces of writing that have come down to us. There is an English translation edited by Cardinal Manning.

the sublime romanticism of the Franciscan life. We see the Poverello accost the wise and powerful who know not the Lady Poverty; we see the old man whom he asks:

> "Tell me, I beseech thee, where the Lady Poverty dwells, how she feeds her flocks, for I languish for the love of her."

We hear the warning voice of age:

> "She is despised in the land of delights, wherefore she dwelleth on the Holy Mountain where God hath placed her. Giants have failed to follow her footsteps and the eagle to fly to the summit of her hill." [1]

But if Francis was not deterred, it was because the love of Christ, who before him had loved poverty, had taken possession of him. It was this vision of Christ that determined for the most part his attitude to Nature. He also enjoyed the Pauline vision of things as symbols of spiritual realities,[2] and understood the grand fraternity of creation. But it was vestiges of Christ particularly which he sought. Little lambs he loved with special affection because they symbolised for him the Lamb of God; he would tread gently on the very stones because in Scripture Christ was called a Rock; the fluttering taper he could scarcely extin-

[1] *Sacrum Commercium*, English translation by Carmichael, p. 9.

[2] "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."—*Rom.* i, 20.

guish because Christ had been called the Light of the World; and on his way he would gently lift the worm by the path, mindful of the text: "I am a worm and no man."

On Alverna, his imitation of Christ was rewarded: he became himself a living crucifixion. And yet, in the midst of all, Francis was the saint of joy. The year before his death, 1225, marked the full expression of the great joy that was in his soul, and it was then he sang his Canticle of the Sun. But as yet the Canticle was incomplete; two important strophes were to be added. One of these, which symbolises Franciscan social work, was the strophe of Peace, the singing of which brought peace to Assisi; the other was a strophe to Sister Death. When the brothers would sing the Canticle at his bedside, Francis would always add: "Praised be Thou, O Lord, for Sister Death." Singing, the joyful Saint went into eternity.

3. *The Franciscan Rule.*

We may now turn to the rule of life laid down by Francis for his followers. Therein we shall find a crystallised expression of his mind. But the Rule itself cannot be appreciated apart from the life of Francis. His life was the fullest expression of him, the greatest revelation of his personality, his greatest writing. For every Franciscan the personality of St. Francis towers above his Rule as an inspiration and an ideal.

At the outset St. Francis scarcely thought of founding a new religious Order as such. As time goes on, one has the constant impression that the Order he has

established is gradually slipping out of his grasp. When, towards the end, he resigns his Generalship and retires, that impression is strongly intensified, and apparently verified by facts.

Whether he thought of it or not, his life proved to be an inspiration. At first he was jeered at and mocked by his fellow-citizens. That was not to last long. Very soon one of the most important men of Assisi, Bernard by name, went over to Francis; in a short time Peter Cathanii and a certain Giles joined the company. Francis was no longer solitary in his way of life.

His first thought was simply to impart to his companions his own secret. Jesus Christ had sufficed for him, and all he wished for was that others should share in his own enthusiastic devotion to God and Christ. He was himself simply the Herald of the High King, and his followers were to be Knights in God's service. So wrapped up was he with the things of the spirit, so confident was he in the loving providence of God, that he took little thought for the morrow. He was constantly telling his followers to take no heed for the morrow where the necessaries of life are concerned. There is something of the same attitude in regard to the future history of the little company that was gathering around him.

True, the formation he gave his first followers was something definite and well thought out. He did not accept all new-comers. He exacted complete detachment, making postulants sell all their goods and give themselves to the service of lepers. He taught them to mortify their senses, he tried them in many

ways—and sometimes he could be very rigorous.[1] But with the few first companions he had very plastic material, where the formation and full development of Christ in them was concerned. Like himself they were heroes and only a great love could have brought them to follow Francis at a time when to follow him was looked upon by wise men as madness and folly.

Francis himself was well aware that only a picked band of spiritual heroes could adopt his mode of life. Just as the fisherman, he said one day, retains only the best fish caught in his net and rejects the others, so must it be with us.[2] That was all very well, but soon the Franciscan net was full to overflowing. Francis saw this coming:

> "I have seen a great multitude of men coming to us, desiring to put on the habit of our holy vocation and to live under the rule of our blessed religion, and their sound is in my ears as they come and go under the orders of holy obedience. I have seen the roads from all the nations full of men coming into these parts: the French are coming, the Spaniards are hastening, the Germans and the English run, and great is the crowd of them who hurry along speaking other tongues." [3]

It requires little insight into human nature to know that where multitudes of men are concerned it is difficult to expect an all-round heroism. Only the few can

[1] *Cf.* I Cel., 34, 35, 42, 43, 51, 76; II Cel., 20, 65, 154.
[2] I Cel., 28.
[3] I Cel., 26.

be expected to rank as heroes. Only the few could enjoy perfect liberty and not abuse it. Human weakness demands a certain minimum of prescriptions and social sanctions if it is to be kept on the narrow path of duty.

In this initial discrepancy between a heroic ideal, to be fully lived only by the few, and the imperative needs of the great masses of ordinary men, we have in germ the future history of the Franciscan order.

The fact that Francis came to write a Rule at all shows that he was not ignorant of the needs of men. Actually he wrote three Rules. The first, approved verbally by Pope Innocent III, in 1209, has not come down to us. It may have been composed of merely verbal exhortations. . . As time went on, and as the needs of the Friars became clearer at their successive Chapter-meetings, the original Rule was modified. Already in 1219, when St. Francis returned from the East, it is clear that he felt the need of something more precise than that which they possessed. With a companion he retired into solitude to write the Rule. When he had written it, he handed it to Brother Elias, who was then administering the Order. Strangely, after a few days, when Francis sought the manuscript, it was nowhere to be found; Elias had apparently mislaid it. However that might be, Francis again retired to the hermitage of Fonte Colombo, there to re-write the Rule under the inspiration of God.

There can be little doubt that his friend, Cardinal Ugolino, had a certain influence on the final form of the Rule as it now stands. Afterwards, as Pope Gregory IX, he declared that he aided Francis, both in writing

the Rule and in obtaining its confirmation. This pontifical approbation was given by Pope Honorius III, on 29th November, 1223.

What are the outstanding features of this Rule? What precisely was the contribution of Francis to the religious history of Church institutions? St. Bonaventure raised the self-same question when he asked why St. Francis founded a new Order. As the answer to this question is of very particular interest for the ideal and spirit of the Franciscan Rule, I think I can do no better than simply quote St. Bonaventure's own reply: his answer is really synthetic and is warranted by an examination of the Rule and life of St. Francis himself.

> "Full of the spirit of God, and influenced by divine charity, our holy Father, St. Francis, was burning with a triple desire. He wished first of all to be a faithful imitator of Jesus Christ in all the perfection of his virtues. Secondly, he was anxious to adhere to God by a contemplation that was constant and continuous. Thirdly, he wished to work for the salvation of souls for whom Christ died. He was not satisfied to remain alone in that, and as no other Order seemed to unite these three desires, he instituted a new Rule so as to have in his own life-time companions who would imitate his virtues, gain souls, and be men of prayer."[1]

The three main things in the Franciscan mode of life were to be imitation of Jesus Christ, the spirit of prayer, and apostolate. If St. Francis did not accept the Rules

[1] *Cf. Op. omnia* (Quarrachi), Vol. viii, p. 338.

of St. Benedict or of St. Augustine it was because they did not contain the precise regimen he desired.

That he refused explicitly to accept simply the monastic rule of life we know. Celano relates that when Francis went to Rome for confirmation of his Rule, a certain Joannes de Sancto Paulo essayed to persuade him to embrace the monastic and eremitical mode of life. At one time Francis had been in doubt whether his life was to be one of pure contemplation, or whether it was to be devoted to action and apostolate. Having decided in favour of the mixed life of prayer and preaching, he could not content himself with the eremitical life.

He felt he was called not only to save his own soul but to bring salvation to other men. It was not without a certain regret that he left behind him the life of contemplation, but once he began to preach he hungered for the widest apostolate possible. The world became his cloister. On different occasions he set out himself for the East in quest of martyrdom.

He was the first religious founder who inserted in his Rule a special chapter on Foreign Missions. The twelfth and final chapter opens thus:

> "Should any Friar moved by divine inspiration desire to go among the Saracens or other infidels, he shall ask leave to go from his Minister Provincial. But the Ministers shall not grant leave except to those whom they deem fit to be sent." [1]

The desire of the apostolate was therefore an important force in the formation of his Rule. But that desire

[1] *Cf.* P. Robinson, O.F.M., *op.cit.*, p. 73.

itself formed part of an all-embracing urge. Francis was enamoured of Christ. He wished to imitate him literally and integrally. He wished to have the mind of Christ, to enjoy as far as humanly possible Christ's union with God by contemplation, and then to imitate Christ in bringing salvation to the world. There is something very intuitive and rapid about St. Francis's vision of things, and the opening words of his Short Rule—it consists of only twelve short chapters, and would occupy from seven to ten pages of a book like the present one—are an epitome of the whole Franciscan Rule.

> "This is the rule of life of the Friars Minor, namely, to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without property, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church: and the other Brothers are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors."

That is the whole of the first chapter of his Rule.

It was a happy stroke of genius on his part to make the Gospel his rule of life. For when he sought approbation for it, and when certain cardinals were troubled by the Franciscan cult of poverty, one among them very wisely pointed out that men could not be very well prevented from observing the Holy Gospel.

In that way the Rule written by the Poor Little Man of Assisi became the fourth great Rule of the Church,

taking its place side by side with the Rules of St. Basil, St. Augustine, and St. Benedict.

The real essentials were imitation of Christ, the spirit of prayer, and an all-embracing apostolate. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that the real Franciscan atmosphere in which these things were to be realised came from poverty. The Lady Poverty had been the liberator for Francis, permitting him whole-heartedly to set about realising the triple object of his Rule. When he began to fill in the outlines of his sketch of the Franciscan life it was natural to expect a new and striking emphasis on poverty. And so it was. St. Francis indicated an ideal of poverty such as was not practised or envisaged by the existing Orders of his time.

Not only did he exclude personal possession of property, forbidding in particular the acceptance of coin or money, but he forbade even the collective ownership of property. Neither individually nor collectively could his Order claim ownership of anything. The sixth chapter of his Rule is clear:

> "The Friars shall appropriate to themselves nothing, neither house nor place, nor anything at all, but as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, they shall go seeking alms with confidence."[1]

There is nothing censorious about Franciscan poverty. St. Francis condemned neither riches nor the rich. He would not have his followers do so either:

[1] *Cf.* P. Robinson, O.F.M., *op.cit.*, pp. 68-69.

"And I admonish and exhort them [the Friars] not to judge or despise those whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and who use dainty food and drink; but rather let everyone judge and despise himself." [1]

No, his followers were to be real little ones (*frati minori*) of the earth, "meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble: speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming." [2]

Because they were poor men, the Franciscans would have to work for their living, or, failing that, go questing alms from door to door. In his Testament he says:

"I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and most earnestly do I desire that all my brethren should employ themselves in honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from anxiety to receive wages, but for good example and to avoid idleness. But should the wages of our work be not given to us, then shall we have recourse to the table of the Lord, asking alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me this salutation, that we should say: 'The Lord give you His peace.' " [3]

The Franciscan Rule also indicates a certain hierarchy within the Order. In the first place came the Minister General, who was to be the Head of the en-

[1] Concluding words of Chapter II.
[2] Chapter III.
[3] *Cf.* P. Robinson, O.F.M., *op.cit.*, p. 84.

tire Order. The world was divided off into certain provinces with a Minister Provincial to govern each; and within the province Guardians were to administer each house. But all were answerable to the Minister General. Outside and above the Order Francis asked the Church for a Cardinal who would be in its regard the representative of the Holy See.

The originality of St. Francis as a Founder may be thus briefly summarized: his emphasis on poverty was new, and he was the first in point of time to make an all-embracing apostolate a direct aim. Before Francis the religious life was either that of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, or a purely monastic life. Neither one nor the other had the apostolate for *direct* aim. With the Franciscans, religious leave their monasteries, and because they have but one Head they are free to take the world for their field of action.[1] But this apostolate, in the mind of Francis, was to flow from a strong inner life of prayer.

The Franciscan mode of life, therefore, may be reduced to two things: in the first place the closest imitation of Jesus Christ (in which a life of prayer is implied) and, secondly, the apostolate, the redemption of souls for Christ. To-day the Franciscans will be found in various fields. In colleges they are educating youth, in universities lecturing to undergraduates, out in foreign countries evangelising pagans, or in leper hospitals tending the sick. But they must ever remem-

[1] Naturally this would depend on Church-law itself for its regulation and determining. Francis was not one to "preach in the dioceses when the bishop was opposed." *Cf.* Chapter IX: *Of Preachers.*

ber that the integral idea of St. Francis is clear and simple. It is not primarily a work of preaching, or a matter of caring for the sick, or of educating youth. The Franciscan ideal is Jesus Christ, Christ first in His contemplative life, and then Christ in His active apostolate; Christ, who made Himself poor for men and died in poverty upon the Cross.

II

THE CHURCH AND THE FRANCISCANS

1. *Franciscan Piety and the Liturgy.*

The Rule of Francis closes with a direct appeal to the Church, and from first to last we have the net impression that he looks to the Church for protection.

A plea has been already made for not separating St. Francis either from the Church or from the Franciscans. To isolate him from the Church would be tantamount to cutting the links that bind the family of Franciscans to their common Father. It was the Church which in the first instance made Francis and his Order possible, and it was the Church which saved the Franciscan Order for Christendom. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, had it not been for the Church, the Order would have disintegrated completely within fifty years after its inception.

The close dependence of Francis on the Catholic Church cannot be over-emphasised. The Saint's indebtedness to the Church for the Christ-life within his soul, and for the Christ-mind that was so apparent in his life, needs to be stressed if we are to have a clear idea of Franciscan spirituality. Now that the full significance of the Church's liturgical life is becoming clearer, since the saintly Pope Pius X launched the liturgical movement, we are, I believe, in a better position to realise what St. Francis, in every phase of his life and sanctity, owed to the Catholic Church. If he inaugu-

rated a new spring-time in the history of Christian spirituality, it was just because the pulse of his own spiritual life beat in harmony with the great pulse of Catholic life.

Before the Church could be indebted to Francis, he had to incur his debt to her. She it is who dispenses the real life won for man on Calvary; by her was he baptised into the life-giving death of Christ. Because he lived that life to an extraordinary degree, showing in his person what Catholic life could do, the Church will ever thank him, and point to him as a real embodiment of her own sanctity.

When he bequeathed to the world the example of his life, and a spirit of piety that would wield enormous influence over the hearts of men, it was but natural that the Church should step in, and watch over, and guard, those men who would answer the call of Francis and leave all things, the better to body forth in their lives the spirit of Francis and of Christ. She would have to save them not only from the enemies without but from the enemy within their very bosom. Her constant preoccupation with the Franciscans is touching.

Even prudence impelled the Church to watch. The Franciscans had, in a short time, become a powerful body the world over. What vital energies might she not have had to lose, had the Franciscans grown up in any way independent of her! Other groups of reformers she had to cast away from her, and in time they totally disappeared. If the group with Francis at its head still remains, we may thank the solicitude of the Church. Himself formed and fashioned by the Church, St. Francis founded an Order that bears

upon it the authentic seal of the Catholic Church.

Certain writers have seen in St. Francis a spirit of revolt against the Church. Renan had dreamed of writing a life of St. Francis and of doing for him what he had already done for the Son of God. He did not live to realise this dream, but he has written sufficient to let us surmise what it might have been. St. Francis would have been the Saint of Nature, in revolt against the Church, an individualist in piety, a forerunner of Luther. Paul Sabatier, inspired by Renan, wrote a life of St. Francis and edited one of the earliest histories of the Saint, the *Speculum Perfectionis*. While he corrects some of Renan's errors, and one of particular importance, which concerned the authenticity of the Testament written by St. Francis, yet from many of his pages the spectre of an individualist Francis seems to emerge.

Paul Sabatier, however, has lived to retract his error, and with an admirable intellectual honesty he does not cease to emphasize the fact. In December 1914, opening a series of lectures on St. Francis before a Protestant audience, M. Sabatier found no more fitting theme than that suggested by the significant strophes of the Catholic liturgy:

"Franciscus vir catholicus,
Et totus apostolicus,
Ecclesiae teneri
Fidem Romanae docuit
Presbyterosque monuit
Prae cunctis revereri.[1]

[1] "Francis, catholic and entirely apostolic, taught fidelity to the Roman Church and recommended the veneration of priests above all other men."

> This antiphon [said M. Sabatier], which emphasises the doctrinal side of the Saint's life, is the expression of strict historical truth.[1]

As regards this attitude of the Saint to the Church, nothing could be clearer than his own words both in the Rule and in the Testament. In the beginning of the Rule he promises obedience to "the Lord Pope Honorius and to his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church," and its concluding words run as follows:

> "Finally, I command the Ministers by obedience that they petition our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church to be governor, protector, and corrector of this fraternity, so that, being always subject and submissive at the feet of the same Holy Roman Church, and steadfast in the Catholic faith, we may observe poverty and humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we have faithfully promised." [2]

At the beginning and at the end of what will be for every Franciscan his Rule of life, obedience to the Church is solemnly promised. A real innovation is also noticeable in St. Francis's request for a Cardinal Protector. Subsequently other religious Orders have followed this example, but in his time he was the first to seek for such a representative of the Church.

He could not have been more submissive to the Church. It is this submissiveness, full of reverence,

[1] See II *Frate Francesco*, Assisi, N. IV (1925).
[2] Chapter XII.

that marks off St. Francis from so many others who appeared in his own day. He had wonderful insight, and was not embittered by any abuse that may have been present in the ranks of the clergy. The whole hierarchy of the Church from Pope to priest was vested for him with a divine light. He saw not the shadow of evil, nor wanted to see it. Of priests he could think no evil. A celebrated phrase attributed to him, if not authentic, is certainly typical. "Did I meet an angel and a priest," he is reported to have said, "I should first kiss the priest's hand and then salute the angel." In his Testament, he writes:

> "The Lord gave me and gives me still such faith in priests who live after the manner of the Holy Roman Church on account of their orders that if they persecuted me I should still have recourse to them, and if I had the wisdom of Solomon, and found priests poor and ignorant according to the world, I should not preach in their parishes against their will. And these priests and all others I am resolved to hold in respect, love, and honour, as my lords; and I will not consider any sin in them, because I behold in them the Son of God, and they are my lords. *I act thus because in this world I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God but His most holy Body and Blood, which they consecrate and receive and which they alone administer to others.*"

Here we are at the common centre of liturgical and Franciscan piety—devotion to the Holy Eucharist. The

greatest thing in the Church is the Eucharist, considered as sacrifice and sacrament. Francis, the poet, was singularly equipped to grasp the significance of the sacramental idea in all its aspects. Jesus Christ Himself was the great Sacrament of God, He was the visible manifestation of God in time, and in His sacramental system He found a sensible means of imparting His own divine Life to men. The very way in which St. Francis expresses his reason for honouring priests shows how much imbued he was himself with the sacramental idea.

He had grasped the profound sense of the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Man-God, of an inaccessible God revealing Himself among men. The very "humanism" of the Saint impelled him in this direction. A poet, he felt instinctively the need of sensible sign to express spirit; he found in Nature the sacrament of God, he found in Christ the highest manifestation of the sacramental principle. But when our Lord had ascended into the regions of the invisible, he had left behind Him the Church, His Spouse. And with the Church He had left Himself beneath the humble appearances of bread and wine. The saint of love, Francis fully appreciated the workings of love. When friends are about to part, they wish to leave behind them something tangible, something that retains in miniature that self which by love they have given to their friends. They fear, and rightly, that continued absence may efface their memories. Man has such need of the sensible element that, in the absence of the living and palpitating personality of those dear to him, their memory is evanescent. Bemoan it as we may, we

have all to acknowledge the influence of time—the healer—on the memory of those who in life were dearest to us.

Our Lord, who well knew the heart of man, who was aware how difficult it is for man to retain his grasp of that which is purely spiritual, had wished also to leave a remembrance of Himself. He had felt that impulse of love which fears oblivion on the part of those loved. But as He was all-powerful, as well as all-loving, He was able to go farther than mere finite lovers. Where they have to content themselves with a symbol, He was able to find a means, co-ordinate with His infinite love, of giving Himself whole and entire to every son of man. By a miracle He would give Himself under the species of bread and wine: "Do this in commemoration of me."

That St. Francis appreciated the intentions of our Lord is clear from his general grasp of the sacramental principle and from the simple text we have quoted from his Testament. Elsewhere he speaks to this effect:

> "Just as the invisible Son of God showed Himself to the Apostles in His true flesh, so also He shows Himself under the species of bread and wine. And just as in His flesh they saw only His Humanity while believing and contemplating with their spiritual eye His Divinity itself, so also we see the bread and wine with our corporal eyes and we firmly believe that there reside His most holy Body and true living Blood."

If we grant his personal love for our Lord and his

intuition of the sacramental idea it seems scarcely an exaggeration to say that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was the very soul of his piety. Even the Lady Poverty had to take a second place when there was a question of honouring the Blessed Sacrament. He desired the Sacrament of the Altar to be reserved in "precious places." From the very outset, writes Celano, he procured for poor churches and for poor priests the precious vessels that were needed. He even went so far as to purchase objects with which to decorate churches, and had them sent secretly to priests. St. Bonaventure assigns a very significant motive for this when he says that the Saint's motive was that he might enter into participation in the cult itself.[1]

The devotion of his heart Francis expresses in those writings we have from his hand. His longest admonition is entitled *De Corpore Christi,* and this was also his first written admonition. To the clergy he addressed a letter *On the respect due to the Body of the Lord and on the cleanliness of the Altars.* A large portion of his second letter *To all the Brothers* is given to the Eucharistic cult, and in his letter *To all the Faithful* there are many references to the same topic. Even in his short note *To the Governors of Peoples* he speaks of it.

The Saint's devotion to churches, which with his own hands he helped to restore, his touching prostration at the sight of a church in the distance, his reverence for priests who consecrate the sacred species, his very preoccupation, mentioned in the Rule, that even

[1] Leg., cap 1, 6.

slips of paper containing the name of God should be gathered up and put in a "becoming place"—all these attitudes had a central source in his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

It would be strange if St. Francis, who so influenced his contemporaries in other respects, had not also some influence in spreading this salutary and liturgical devotion to the Sacrament of the Altar. In his time the practice of Communion had been so abandoned that the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 found it necessary to prescribe the annual Communion.

> "So great was the evil, however, [writes Dom. Guéranger] that the prescriptions of Councils and even the genius of Innocent III, the last of the great Popes of the Middle Ages, would not have sufficed to extirpate it, had not God given St. Dominic and St. Francis to the Church; they brought back honour to the priesthood and reanimated the piety of the people." [1]

Enough has been said to show that St. Francis found a way to Christ through the priestly hierarchy of the Church. The Franciscan mind was formed, as it were, by contact with the Christian mind of the Church. It was while he prayed in the little church of St. Damian that he heard the voice of Christ speaking to him from the crucifix. It was at the Mass, which he must have followed closely, gathering as he did the sense of the gospel read, that he received decisive light as to his future vocation.

[1] *L'année liturgique*, Wednesday after the Feast of the Trinity.

Francis followed closely the unfolding of the Church's liturgy. The essential rôle and mission of the liturgy, writes Dom. Festugière, is that, while invoking Jesus, it is charged with continuing at the same time really and mystically His presence and His action and His words among men.[1] Underlying this is the fundamental truth that Christ crucified on Calvary still lives and communicates with souls. Now in St. Francis we have the term, as it were, of a gradual evolution of mediæval piety. The growing attachment to the sacred humanity of Christ found its fullest and highest expression in the Poverello of Assisi.

Francis was particularly impressed by the cycle of our Lord's feasts, His human feasts, which play a large part in the ecclesiastical year. Recall his devotion to Christmas, and that scene at Greccio which was to be popularised by his followers. The Franciscan devotion to the crib of Bethlehem has continued down through the centuries to hold its place on the very margin of the liturgy. Christ in the crib of Bethlehem, Christ on Calvary, and Christ in the holy Eucharist focussed the Saint's attention. Of the Passion of Christ he could not think without melting into tears. He composed for private devotion an Office of the Passion, and the only signature of his writings was the large Tau, signifying the Cross. In the blessing which he sent to Brother Leo during his sojourn on the heights of Alverna it is interesting to notice that the stem of the cross divides the name of Leo (thus: Le†o), showing clearly that Francis was simply copying the method employed in liturgical

[1] *La Liturgie Catholique*, Maredsous, p. 113.

blessings, as anyone will remember who has seen the blessings of the Missal.

Not only did he follow the Church in her sacramental rendering-anew of the life of Christ, but he followed her in her lesser feasts. Was it not to celebrate the feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady (August 15) and then to prepare himself by a forty days' fast for the feast of St. Michael (September 29) that he ascended Mount Alverna?

He also adopted the Church's idea of the Divine Office as a sanctification of the whole day. He recited it, and, no matter where he found himself, he would stop and say the particular hour that the time of the day demanded. He wished his Brothers to do the same. Thus in his Rule he says: "The clerics shall say the Divine Office *according to the use of the Roman Church*." He then goes on immediately to add that for this reason the Friars may have breviaries.

There is much more beneath the simple words underlined than at first sight might appear. They presuppose a whole evolution of the official prayer of the Church, and really inaugurated a new phase, which was to lead up to the reform of Pius V, which holds to the present day. When St. Francis wrote his second Rule in 1221, he said simply that the clerics should say the Office like other clerics. But in his final Rule he definitely states that they shall say the Office according to the use of the Roman Church. As a matter of fact the Office as said at the papal court differed in important points from the general use of the Church. For one thing, owing to many circumstances, the Office of the papal court was shorter than the ancient Office.

Once such reforms began, it was impossible to see their end. Other churches would in time modify the Office. St. Francis, by definitely accepting the Roman use, ensured a certain unity. Moreover, at that time personal recitation of the canonical hours outside choir was rather of counsel than of obligation. With the Breviary such recitation was within the reach of all.

St. Francis, however, made one exception. The Friars, he enjoined, were to say the Office according to the use of the Roman Church, *except the psalter,* for which reason they might have breviaries. The papal chapel employed the Roman psalter, which had been revised and corrected by St. Jerome. This psalter, however, had not been popular outside the Roman court; the popular psalter was known as the Gallican psalter. With the success of the Franciscan breviary, which was welcomed everywhere in time, the Roman psalter was forgotten except for certain accessory parts which have been incorporated into the Breviary. To this extent St. Francis not only observed the liturgical life of the Church, but actually influenced it in that which is most important, its official prayer.

It was only because he was thoroughly imbued with a sense of the liturgy that he was in a position so to influence the Church's practice. Even in that in which he is most original, his love of Nature, it is not difficult to see the Saint's indebtedness to the liturgy.

St. Bonaventure, explaining St. Francis's devotion to the Church, says that he saw in the Church an image of the celestial hierarchy. So speaking, St. Bonaventure had in mind a doctrine which was an inheritance from previous ages. As old as Christianity itself, it had

found its most explicit expression in the writings of the Pseudo-Denis. It is the view of the universe as a work of art, at once concealing and revealing the divine ideas; it sees in the hierarchy of the sensible world a far-off image of the world of pure intelligences; and accordingly it suggests to man the spiritualising of his commerce with Nature on the one hand, and, on the other, the bodying forth in rite and symbol of the highest sentiments of the human soul.

If we look well, we shall see that this is a doctrine deep at the source of mediæval life and thought. At first an instinct, it becomes conscious of itself in the divine poetry of a Dante, in the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas, in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* of a Bonaventure. In stone and marble it carved itself in Gothic cathedrals with their heaven-aspiring spires, crystallising within itself Nature's beauties, and imaging forth in sensible relief the Saviour, the Queen, and the Angelic choirs.

But Francis stood at the threshold of the thirteenth century. He had not, at least directly, inherited the sublime teachings of the early mystics; but he found himself face to face with Nature. By temperament he was sensitive to creation's natural beauty; love gave him eyes to see the hidden things of God, and the liturgy gave him words wherewith to express the sentiments that spontaneously well up in his soul. He discovered Nature for his contemporaries, but the key to Nature's book he found in the Book of religion.

Long before St. Francis had sung the praises of the Lord in the name of Brother Sun, David had seen in the sun a sublime symbol, and before Francis had mani-

fested his vivid realisation of the omnipresence of God, David had sung his *"Quo ibo a spiritu tuo"* (Ps. cxxxviii, 7). The Church actually supplies Francis with a medium of expression, and when his soul bursts forth in song what have we but an echo of the Church's psalmody? Compare the Canticle of the Sun with the psalm which priests recite for Sunday Lauds, the *Benedicite omnia opera Domini Domino,* and you will realise to what extent Francis's mind was saturated with the liturgy. Other proofs of this are to be found in his commentary on the *Our Father,* and in the Office of the Passion that he composed.

St. Francis had a marked attachment to Sacred Scripture, and in particular to those parts of scripture which were to be found in the liturgy. There is a touching incident towards the end of the Saint's life which reveals at once what Francis owed to the Scriptures.

"Father," said a Brother to him, "you have had always recourse to the Scriptures, and they have not failed to assuage your sufferings. Let it be your wish then that I read to you some passage from the prophets; perhaps it will aid you to rejoice and exult in the Lord."

To which the Saint replied: "It is good to read the Scripture and to seek there the Lord, our God. For my part I have made such use of the holy writings that it suffices for me to meditate in my memory on what I know of them."

"No deaf listener to the Gospel," says Celano, "he retained in his memory all he heard, and diligently set about its fulfilment."

Where, in fact, we should have expected some details

beyond what the official liturgical life of the Church supplies, we find them not. We have in mind the injunctions of St. Francis, very valuable as they come from his own unaided hand, about what he calls *Pious Living in Hermitages*. It is well worth quoting as it shows precisely the hold that the Church's way of life had upon his mind. It is as follows:

> "Those who wish to live piously in a hermitage must be three or at most four Brothers. Two of them shall be mothers and shall have the other two for sons, or the one. But the mothers shall lead the life of Martha and the others the life of Mary.
>
> "The two who are mothers shall lead the life of Martha and the two sons shall lead the life of Mary, and shall have an enclosure with the cell, where they can pray and sleep. And as soon as the sun has set they shall pray Compline and try to maintain silence, but at Matins they shall get up and say their hours and 'seek first for God's Kingdom and his justice.' And at the proper time they shall pray Prime, and after Tierce they can break the silence and go to their mothers, and, if they wish they can beg an alms of them like other poor people, for God's sake. And later they shall pray Sext and None and say Vespers at a suitable time."

Obviously the interior life of the Brothers was to have been nourished by the hidden manna of the Divine Office. In general we may say the spiritual life of St. Francis and his first companions was simply the liturgical life of the Church with that prolongation into

their private lives of prayer and solitude which we may say is a natural result of the liturgical life itself.

2. *The Franciscan Families.*

From the foregoing it is evident that the Church had paramount importance in the eyes of St. Francis. To strengthen the bonds that would bind his Order to the Church he even sought a cardinal who would be a protector and a corrector. His followers were to be the humblest servants of the Church, never going against the Church's hierarchy, yet with power from the Pope to make the whole world the field of their activities. Francis was not one to think much of the morrow, and by his own intimate relations with the Papacy as well as by the general tenor of his Rule there was the implicit invitation to the Church to look after the growing multitude of his sons. Towards the end of his life Francis felt very like a little black hen whose wings could no longer cover its many chickens. In any crisis, one feels sure, Francis would have sided with the Church—and there were many disturbing moments in Franciscan history when the Church had to intervene to save the Friars both from their friends and from their enemies.

Already in the lifetime of the Saint himself there were certain divisions among his followers. In time these divisions grew, and to-day we find ourselves in presence of an accomplished fact: there are three great families of Franciscan lineage, with three distinct heads recognised by the Church as the legitimate successors of St. Francis. These three great bodies, which divide

among themselves the authentic sons of the First Order of St. Francis, are the Friars Minor comprising nearly 19,000 religious, the Friars Minor Conventual, to the number of 1,700, and the Friars Minor Capuchin, who number about 10,500 religious.

Without referring to the Second and the Third Orders founded by St. Francis one sees at a glance the appeal of Franciscanism to men. And yet a cursory view of this dispersion, so to speak, of the Franciscan vocation into three distinct families makes one feel uneasy about the original ideal of St. Francis, so heroic, so simple in itself. The necessity for reform seems to point to an obvious relaxation and betrayal of the Saint. And certain writers have loved to picture the solitary Saint weeping over the destinies of his Order. In reality, the whole matter is not quite so simple as that. Even looking at it in that way, why should we not see in reform a real effort to get back to the ideal? That would be as true a way of viewing things as concentrating on the apparent relaxation which necessitated reform.

In effect, the first differences that arose in the time of St. Francis and immediately after his death are just the differences that are constantly recurring. Nowhere is it more true to say that history repeats itself than when one speaks of the history of the Franciscan Order. The history of any religious institution is bound up with the observance of its Rule. But to trace vicissitudes in the observance of the Rule merely and exclusively to perversity and a wish to betray the ideal shows a lack of vision.

There are many things physically possible, or possible for a certain number of men, which are morally

impossible for great multitudes. Theologians are well aware of that when they speak of the moral necessity for revelation or for grace, if the natural law is to be observed for a certain length of time in its entirety. When crowds flocked to the standard of St. Francis the same simple-minded heroism was not to be expected from them as from the first few companions. If all men were heroes then we should have no heroes. And crowds did come almost immediately; it was not then quite so easy to live in hermitages and to trust so simply to divine providence for food and raiment. Our Lord Himself had to perform a miracle in the desert.

Thousands soon came from the four quarters of the earth, and with them came an influence on the observance of the Rule due to the different circumstances and different climates. St. Francis in the Fourth Chapter of the Rule had already taken cognisance of different "seasons and cold climates" with regard to the sick and the clothing of the Friars.

With the coming of professors from the University of Bologna and of learned clerics, a new and important element appeared that would certainly influence the destinies of the Order. By giving permission to St. Anthony to teach theology the Saint had favoured this new development of his family. Moreover, the simple moral exhortatory preaching of the Friars would not always satisfy the needs of the Church. When they took up the study of theology it was only natural to expect that moral discourses would lead to dogmatic sermons, if not actually to treatises on theology itself.

These are some of the influences that must be allowed for in the ultimate shaping of the Franciscan Order.

No one need exaggerate sympathy to the point of thinking that among the Friars there were no abuses, or instances of half-hearted observance, or relaxations. It is evident enough that St. Bonaventure, when he became General of the Order, had no easy task. Abuses he condemned in strong terms, but he gave definite shape and form to the corporate body of the Franciscans. It is no mean testimony to his character that men of different and conflicting views looked up to him.

The different reforms testify to the lasting force of the life and ideals of St. Francis. It was always in order to defend the two most important aspects of the Rule that reforms sprang up. The one was the spirit of poverty, the other was the spirit of prayer. All the reforms as we know them have this in common, that certain men have simply attempted to get back to the Franciscan life in its pristine vigour and simplicity.

The Rule itself, by making active apostolate part of the Franciscan life, and by bringing the Friars into such close contact with the world, exposed its two most delicate points to the shock of changing circumstances, the influences and the dangerous affection of friends who had no better way of showing their gratitude than by being good to the Friars. Crises arose when the spirit of prayer and devotion was threatened by the rise of study and the necessities of the apostolate. Crises arose when the Friars entered the cities, built large convents, and seemed to forget the Lady Poverty.

Briefly then we may sketch the growth and division of the Franciscan Family. The Church's influence on St. Francis in his legislation is symbolised by the power which Ugolino, first as Cardinal Protector,

and later on as Pope Gregory IX, wielded over him. There is a story in the *Legenda Antiqua* which tells of Francis's desire that if the Ministers did not insist on the literal observance of the Rule the Friars should be free to observe it even against the desires of the Ministers. No doubt it is due to the restraining hand of Ugolino that Francis, instead of expressing this desire, merely says:

> "And wherever the Friars may be who know and feel that they cannot observe the Rule spiritually, they can and should have recourse to their Ministers. And the Ministers should receive them kindly and charitably and show such familiarity that these same Friars may speak and treat with them as masters with their servants, for so it ought to be that the Ministers should be the servants of all the Friars." [1]

Likewise, when St. Francis in his Testament says, "Since the Lord gave me charge over the brethren no man showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live after the manner of the Holy Gospel," there was just a danger that certain Friars would look upon the Rule as something directly inspired by God, something in fact above the Church itself. Towards the end of the Testament the Saint wrote:

> "And I strictly forbid under obedience all my brethren both clerics and lay-brothers to put any gloss

[1] Chapter X.

upon the Rule, or upon these words of mine, saying: Thus they are to be understood."

What did Ugolino do? As Pope Gregory IX, four years after the death of St. Francis on 28th September, 1320, he issued the Bull, *Quo elongati a saeculo,* the net effect of which was singularly to diminish the force of the Saint's Testament, thereby preparing the way for the right of interpretation. Those who were for the observance of the Rule *sine glossa* were in a precarious position. For a Franciscan to choose bebetween the Pope and St. Francis was no enviable task.

It is easy to picture a follower of St. Francis, looking back to the first days of liberty in the valley of Spoleto, when everything was quiet and simple and prayerful, dissatisfied with the organisation that numbers needed. The growth of learning, books and universities, large convents with some Friars very unlike the Little Poor Man of Assisi—these were things hurtful to him. Gradually those who looked back to the first days and who wanted the Rule *sine glossa* came to be known as the "Spirituals", as opposed to those who favoured the new development and were "of the Community" as they were styled.

On both sides there were men of balanced judgment, men who wished to retain as far as possible the original vigour of the Rule, while admitting certain interpretations in accordance with the exigencies of time and circumstance. The election of Brother Elias as Minister General precipitated matters. It became well-nigh unbearable for those in favour of literal observance.

Even during the life-time of St. Francis certain Friars lived more or less completely the life of hermits. The tradition of retiring to hermitages remained unbroken. With Elias as General we find that certain Friars united themselves under Cæsarius of Spires to live in hermitages. This was in 1236, barely ten years after the death of St. Francis. But with the election of John of Parma in 1247 these followers of Cæsarius came back naturally to their convents.

There were others not quite so amenable; these really turned out to be the Spirituals later condemned by Pope John XXII. Their leaders were Peter John Olivi in Provence, Angelo Clareno in the Marches of Ancona and Ubertino of Casale in Tuscany. Olivi, somewhat imbued with Joachimism, died in 1288, and was venerated by the others as a saint. On several points they differed from those of the Community. Their differences may be symbolised by the fact that they regarded the Bull, *Quo elongati,* of Gregory IX as the beginning of the degradation of the Franciscan Order. Towards 1317, both Angelo of Clareno and Ubertino were thrown into prison. The Spirituals were condemned.

For a time at least John XXII, by his condemnation of the Spirituals, had saved the unity of the Franciscan Order. The only danger now was that every effort at reform would be stifled by the very fear of the exaggerations into which the Spirituals had been led. In reality the reform of the Spirituals could not be called a true Franciscan reform, for its main object was to eliminate one of the essential elements of the Rule. The object of the Rule, as we have seen, was not a

purely eremitical form of life; it aimed essentially at an apostolate that would flow from a rich inner life of prayer. But there was the difficulty. It is a delicate affair to secure the proper poise and balance of the active and contemplative lives. It is human enough to spend oneself in feverish activity, and at times, it must be confessed, the Franciscans were very human.

With the disappearance of the Spirituals it took some time before a certain opposition, this time much less accentuated, arose within the ranks of the remaining Friars. But it did arise. Indeed, it appears, looking at Franciscan history broadly, that there will be always a certain opposition between those enamoured of the ideal, and those who, while loving the ideal, have an eye for actual conditions and circumstances. These two outlooks, I feel sure, will be found in each of the three great bodies of Franciscans existing at the present day.

They have always existed, and frequently in very unstable harmony. In the second half of the thirteenth century there was a renaissance of the Franciscan spirit in the name of Regular Observance. It was the first reform which, after many difficulties, succeeded. In 1368 it was accepted, and the Observants obtained permission to leave the convents of the cities and withdraw into hermitages.

In this we can see the typical gesture of Franciscans anxious above all to safeguard the spirit of prayer and devotion, to which, as St. Francis said, all things should be subservient. But it is not less typical of the whole course of Franciscan history that these same Observants found themselves impelled, in order to retain the two elemental things of their Rule to return again to the

cities. Their numbers had grown considerably, within a hundred years the old opposition appeared, and the Observants came back to convent-life. In 1415 they were recognised as autonomous except that their general had to be confirmed by the Franciscans "of the Community."

In time certain Friars "of the Community" came to be known as "Conventuals." The first appearance of the name is probably in the Bull *Super Gregem* (1415), of Pope Eugenius IV. In that year an attempt was made to unite the "Observants" with those "of the Community."

The attempt failed. Some of those who were "of the Community" had begun to hold property and to enjoy fixed revenues. The Minister General, Fra Guglielmo, tried to remedy this, but as no success seemed possible, he asked Pope Martin V to allow such houses to enjoy income, but not the right of property. That permission was granted. But it was not accepted by all those "of the Community." In 1517, Pope Leo X united into one common body those who had not accepted fundamental dispensations from the Rule, and these Friars were called Friars Minor of the Regular Observance.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, therefore, there were two great branches of the Franciscans—the Observant Friars Minor and the Conventual Friars Minor. But soon the same process began again in the heart of the body of the Observant Friars Minor. And during the years 1525-1528 the Friars Minor Capuchin arose, separated from the Observants, and became in time autonomous.

I have not here time to tell the story of the rise of

the Capuchins. It has been excellently related by Father Cuthbert in his recent work, "The Capuchins." [1] His picture of their founder, Matteo di Bascio of the Order of the Franciscan Observants, setting out from the Friary of Montefalcone, in the Marches of Ancona, to see the Pope, is a vivid one. Striking also is the following scene with all it implies.

"Then came a day when the perplexities of his mind were brought to a clear judgment. The brethren of Montefalcone had attended a funeral at some distance from the friary. They were returning home, Matteo following in the rear, when they came across a beggar lying by the wayside, starved with the cold and almost naked. The friars pressing on ahead, passed by the beggar unheeding; but Matteo coming up, stopped, knelt by the beggar with comforting words, and taking off his cloak, wrapped the beggar in it. . . Surely it seemed to him, the starved beggar by the wayside had the greater right (than the friars) to call himself a follower of the poverty St. Francis loved. Matteo betook himself to prayer. . . He was thus praying when within his spirit he heard a voice which thrice bade him 'observe the Rule to the letter.' " [2]

I am conscious that the foregoing is a very fragmentary sketch of the origins of the three branches of Franciscans as we know them. I have said nothing of the Alcantarins, the Recollects, and the Reformed, for the simple reason that they have been merged into the

[1] Two vols., Sheed & Ward, 15s. net.
[2] *The Capuchins*, Vol. I, p. 20.

Friars Minor of to-day; that was the work of Pope Leo XIII in 1897.

This much, however, will be clear: the reforms, such as they were, illustrate the attempt to live the Franciscan Rule in its integral form. It does not follow at all that there was all-round relaxation when they occurred. Frequently, such relaxation was more or less local, and at all times the difficulty of balancing the life of prayer and of apostolic activities was felt, as well as a certain sensitiveness about Franciscan poverty. The Spirituals, ultimately condemned by the Church, could not properly be styled a Franciscan reform. On the other hand, the Observant reform of the latter half of the thirteenth century was truly Franciscan in spirit and in progress. Having left the cities in the first moments of enthusiasm for a life of prayer, the Observants found their way back again among men. Likewise the Alcantarins, the Recollects, and the Reformed voiced a strong protest against a purely external life of ministry. In both cases the willingness to forsake the delights of contemplation for the arduous work of ministry showed a real grasp of the mind of Francis, who wished his followers to be apostles as well as contemplatives.

When, however, Pope Pius V divided the Conventuals and the Observants, a strong emphasis was laid on poverty. And when the Founder of the Capuchins set out to seek audience with the Pope to solve his perplexities, there was also that Franciscan sensitiveness about poverty.

In all cases the reforms illustrate the Franciscan spirit. There was always the question of the two out-

standing characteristics of the Franciscan Rule; the question of poverty, and the question of the mixed life of prayer and action. To the philosophers of history we leave the question as to which of the two supplies the real motive for Franciscan reform: was it poverty, or the difficulty of a proper balance of the life of prayer and the life of action? Personally, I should like to make a distinction; in fact, I should say, the real reason of reform arose from human weakness, which finds it hard to balance the life of action and the life of prayer; yet psychologically it may well have been the neglect of the high poverty of St. Francis himself which was operative. The instinctive recourse to hermitages safeguarded at once both poverty and the inner life of devotion.

III

FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

1. *Mysticism.*

The spirituality exemplified in the life of St. Francis and expressed with such simplicity in his Rule was a distinctive one. It was the response of his personality and temperament to the felt attractiveness of the ideal. The Lady Poverty was his own poetic symbolisation of a spiritual principle. That principle was liberty. Poverty freed him from things of earth, it liberated him from the cult of self; his spirit could then wing its flight to God. He had no fear lest possessing God, he should have naught else besides. Possessing God he felt rich indeed—"My God and my all." The ordinary man may claim as his what belongs to him by right of private property. But Francis claimed the world at large with all its truth, its beauty and its goodness. He claimed the future too, for he knew it lay with God. Because he was poor in the things of this world he was rich in the things that count, joy and liberty of spirit. He took little thought of the morrow and in consequence a charming *abandon* enhanced all his days. A little incident from the *Fioretti* will serve to illustrate this.

It was just such an evening as one may see at any time in the Umbrian valley. The countryside lay in

an attitude of prayerful silence. The setting sun was sending up its last ruddy rays of light like tapers all aglow, and evening mists mounted, like incense from a vast thurible. Beside a village gate the little Francis and the handsome Brother Masseo met, and conversing together approached the wayside fountain, there to wash from their feet the accumulated dust of the day and partake of the food they had gathered from "the table of the Lord." The Saint had obtained very little, says the *Fioretti;* his appearance was so mean and contemptible that he was taken for an ordinary beggar and sent away empty-handed. Not so Masseo, with his fine appearance and noble bearing. He had been loaded with great pieces of white bread.

"Oh, Brother Masseo," said the little Francis, "we are not worthy of such treasures."

As he kept on repeating this to himself, Brother Masseo, with a rather human logic, said "How, Brother Francis, do you speak of treasures? What have we? Nothing but Poverty. Everything we need is lacking; we have neither napkin, nor knife, nor table, nor house, nor servant."

To this St. Francis replied, with a logic that was not merely human: "O Brother Masseo, is it not true that here in this happy spot we are guests of the high King? Realise what priceless treasures His hand has given us; for table this stone, so large and white, and delightful water, which we share with our brothers the birds, who fly away among the trees and chant their melodies of thanksgiving. Brother, what opulence is our misery! We are the dear children of a tender Father who has adorned the earth with beauty

for our benefit. Brother Masseo, let us sing the praises of Lady Poverty, who has delivered us from the burden of riches. . . "

Behind the charming naivety and simplicity of the Poverello's reply we see the firm grasp he had of the spiritual significance of poverty. Francis had the poetic power of intuition. Abstractions had scarcely time to be, before they trembled into things of beauty; his life was consequently itself a poem.

Poverty was for him a means of liberation and of freedom. But it was only a means. The end and aim was love. Love was really the unifying force of his whole personality. The deep inner urge of the human soul to God was sublimated by charity in Francis. Love was the hidden force behind all his activities and, in its outgoing reach to God, it unified all the energies of his person, binding together in a common striving sensibility, heart and mind. By poverty the holocaust was prepared; all that was wanting was the flame of love.

To the end of time Francis will be vested, in humanity's eyes, in that flame of love. He is rightly called the Seraph of Assisi. Franciscan Spirituality is a holiness of love, and unerringly men will mark off the true Franciscan by the title of seraph.

Love is the central focus of Franciscan spirituality. The cult of poverty was intended to remove all obstacles that might prevent the full glow of love. The same is to be understood of all asceticism in the Franciscan life. In the present state of man, with his corrupt inclinations, asceticism is a necessity for any kind of spiritual life. It is only by sacrifice of things and of

self that man can fully live to God. When Christ won life for men by death He set His seal on what was a fundamental law of life: through death to life. And those whose professed object in life is God consecrate their lives by a triple sacrifice, of things, of the flesh, and of their own wills. It was a Franciscan, Brother Boniface Maes, who defined mystical theology as the "practical science that teaches us to love God and hate ourselves." [1] The definition is succinct and true. It needs to be emphasised for the modern mind, so prone to overlook the ascetical element in Franciscanism in the desire to glorify its appealing humanism.

It is true that there is a human touch about the mysticism of St. Francis. He was a lover of all things great and small. Nothing human was alien to him. He had an eye for the beauties of this world. He rediscovered Nature for his contemporaries. He was a poet. His mysticism was sacramental, reaching through things of sense to hidden beauties. While other mystics closed their eyes on earthly beauty the better to concentrate on the things of spirit, Francis opened them wide, and creation felt better for the fact; the human mind has indeed been singularly enriched by the Franciscan vision.

But how was this made possible? It is only when we reflect deeply that we realise that the mysticism of St. Francis, like that of other saints, was based on asceticism and renunciation. It seems characteristic of the first throes of deep conversion that a distaste for mere terrestrial beauty springs up in the human soul.

[1] *Cf. Franciscan Mysticism*, English translation by Dom Basil Whelan, O.S.B. Sheed & Ward.

To this St. Francis was no exception. The beginnings of his awakenings to the things of the spirit were associated with a certain dissatisfaction with the transitory joys of life. It was only when he had renounced himself to the fullest that he found "sweetness of soul and body" in a leper's kiss. It was only when he had sacrificed all things that he came to Nature with full security and with a new vision. He came back to creatures with transfigured eyes. He saw them in that light which streams from the throne of God. Everything had become redolent of God. He sang his sweetest song of earth's beauty when the eyes of his body were almost closed by blindness.

Francis did not start from Nature. He set out from God and found Him everywhere. To start with Nature, it would seem, is to start at the wrong end. True, from Nature to Nature's God is a logical passage for the human mind. Indeed man has never been satisfied to remain at the sense level. For a truly æsthetic appreciation of Nature it is necessary to see it flooded with the light of the invisible. Paganism created a dryad for every tree, a naiad for every spring—so true is it that the eye is not filled with seeing, nor the ear with hearing. Yet, historically, the results were not always happy. It is characteristic of Nature's most brilliant activities that, though vaguely suggesting the infinite, they attract attention to themselves and clothe themselves with divine attributes.

The Franciscan scholar, J. Jörgensen, was for a time so misled. He had felt the attraction of Francis's poetic genius; he had in common with the Saint a love of Nature which expressed itself in prayer in the presence

of the setting sun or amidst the splendours of the starlit night; he lost himself in admiration of Nature; he became a lover of solitude and of the woods, and soon followed the way pointed by a Goethe, a Heine or a Schelling; he learned to adore Nature—not God, but the gods.

Romanticism, according to a pithy phrase of Ernest Hello, is mysticism gone wrong; the mystic, because he is a "God-intoxicated" man, will seek God everywhere; he has an eye for the things of God, he has faith, he has vision. But begin with faith, as St. Francis did, and Nature finds its true value; begin with an all-absorbing love, as Francis did, and Nature will be no obstacle in the pursuit of the ideal. What is characteristic of his mysticism is that his love was so great that asceticism, instead of being only a means to love, was rather an outlet for his love. By suffering and renunciation he eased his soul, as it were, of the burden of his love. The purifying process was of comparatively slight duration; a few temptations at the outset were quickly overcome, and after that it is truer to say he suffered because he loved, rather than that he suffered in order to love.

In its simplest form mysticism signifies an appreciation of the hidden meaning of things. The mystic is one who consciously sets out in quest of the hidden God. In the divine designs man is intended for vision; he is raised to the supernatural order; he is incorporated with Jesus Christ. Only by Him and through Him can man find God. The hidden meaning of the present order is necessarily linked up with the Word made flesh, with Jesus Christ.

Franciscan mysticism is eminently calculated to bring

home these fundamental truths of Christian mysticism. The mystic search for God finds conscious expression in love. The dominant note of Franciscanism is love. St. Francis himself was mystical, not only in the general sense of being absorbed by the thought of God, but in the more special sense that he enjoyed graces of the highest degree.

His Rule bears testimony to his mystical preoccupations. He so emphasised the contemplative aspect of the Franciscan life that all else is made subordinate to the "spirit of devotion." St. Francis intended his followers to speak to others out of the fulness of the heart. Before being men of action, the Franciscans must be men of prayer.

Willingly would Francis himself have devoted all his time and energy to contemplation. His prayer was simply the effusion of a soul in love with God and with Jesus Christ. It was the outgoing of a soul desirous of union, conscious that God was all in all for it. "My God and my all!" is the true Franciscan prayer. But it was a prayer that went up to God through Jesus Christ.

In the evolution of mediæval piety, St. Francis stands out in bold relief for his emphasis of Jesus Christ as the Way to God. His prayer on Mount Alverna, so tender, so solicitous for complete association with Christ in His Sacred Passion, is typical. Franciscan mysticism knows not the temptation to overlook the Sacred Humanity of our Lord in quest of God. St. Teresa tells how she was tempted to overlook all bodily objects, the Humanity of our Lord included, in order to spiritualise her commerce with God. She subsequently came back to meditation on our Lord, and ever afterwards lost no

opportunity of insisting on the efficacy of such contemplation. St. Bonaventure held expressly that meditation on the Passion might ultimately lead to the highest contemplation of the splendours of the hidden God. The late Cardinal Mercier was wont to say: "One cannot help regretting having wasted so much time in seeking elsewhere the lessons of spirituality when it would have been so easy to learn from St. Francis in contemplation of Jesus Crucified."

Nor can Franciscan spirituality be accused of overemphasising the Humanity of our Lord. Nobody was more conscious of God in Christ than St. Francis, and St. Bonaventure, equally with St. Thomas, insists that devotion to the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord must be spiritualised and related to the Divinity if it is not to lead to mere emotionalism.[1]

The love of St. Francis was no mere passing emotion. It was the very soul of his whole life. Willingly would he have remained in the heights rapt in God. At certain times we have the feeling that he came down to the plains only with great reluctance. At the outset he had grave doubts. Contemplation was attracting him. But, having taken advice from Brother Sylvester and St. Clare, he decided that the Franciscans were not intended by God for a life of pure contemplation. They were destined for action.

[1] *Cf.* Fr. Dunstan, O.S.F.C., *Franciscan Mysticism* (Franciscan Studies, New York, No. 6, 1927), pp. 98f.

2. *Apostolate.*

The love of God is made to prove itself by love for man. This is the second essential trait of the Franciscan outlook in the spiritual life. If there is anything particularly proper to the Saint in this—theologians are agreed that love of God and love of man are but aspects of one and the same charity—it is that he was the first founder of a religious order to insert it explicitly in his Rule.

Moreover, there is a certain atmosphere surrounding Franciscan love of men, which has always made it attractive. There is a simplicity and a joy in which Franciscan fraternal charity always bathes, that remove a certain censoriousness so distasteful to the objects of one's charity. When a brother cried out with hunger in the night the natural gesture of St. Francis was to assemble the brethren and eat with the brother lest he should feel ill at ease. When there was a question of robbers in the neighbourhood, the Saint outlined a plan of conversion that was certainly based on reaching their souls through their bodies; the robbers were converted.

As Francis made the world his cloister, he saw his brothers everywhere. And he said: "If a mother loves and cherishes her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently ought everyone love and cherish him who is his brother according to the spirit!" The joy that he inculcated on his brothers as religious duty was calculated to win over men when mere preaching could not do so. Joyous praise was the natural result of Franciscan love. For joy is the natural outcome of super-

natural charity. And in itself it was an inspiration to see Francis and his companions go along the roads singing the praises of the most High God.

What greater proof could he have given to the world that he was living the Gospel of Beatitude than a joyous liturgy of unfailing praise? Even on his deathbed he sang. He must have felt at times that people were watching his little group to know if this cult of joy was a mere pose or something with the soul of sincerity in it. He was not at all troubled by the opinions of men, yet he wished his companions to be joyful. There was only one sorrow for him, and that was sin. When we speak of sin's pleasures, surely we do so unwittingly, for pleasures

> are like poppies spread—
> You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
> Or like the snow-fall in the river—
> A moment's white—then melts for ever;
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form
> Vanishing amid the storm.

whereas supernatural joy is lasting.

But joy presupposes peace, and Francis was at peace with God and man. When men seemed to doubt him, he was unruffled. There is a charming little story which tells of how a poor peasant met the frairs one day, and touching Francis familiarly on the shoulder, asked if he were the Francis of whom everybody was speaking just then. On being told that it was so, he put up a warning finger to Francis and said: "Brother, I hope you are as good as they say you are." Francis was overjoyed and

went down on his knees and thanked the poor peasant. Such humility was entirely disarming.

The same humility was to enhance all Franciscan efforts at reform. In his own day there was strife of city against city, and discord had penetrated to the very precinct of the Church itself. At the end of the twelfth century the Church had riches and a certain worldly power. Bishops were feudal lords and frequently possessed vast territories, to defend which it was sometimes necessary to have recourse to arms. But where others were drastic in their ideas of reform, the humble Francis was gentle. He felt in his heart that the Church had no need of substantial reform; all he claimed for himself was the right, under the guidance of the Church, to live the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a dramatic day, he added a special strophe of peace to his celebrated Canticle of the Sun. He was at the Bishop's palace in Assisi, and ill in bed. A dispute had arisen between the Bishop and the magistrates of the town. How Francis must have longed to go and disperse the clouds that threatened, as on so many occasions he had done for other towns of Italy, for Perugia, Bologna, Arezzo! But he could not. And so, calling a companion, he told him to go and seek the Podestà and bring him with all the principal citizens to the palace. Two other brothers he sent on a similar errand, telling them clearly what to do: when all were assembled in the palace-court they were to advance before the gathering and, as two jongleurs of God, ascend a platform, and giving a sign, begin:

"In his illness Brother Francis has composed, for

the glory of God and for the edification of his neighbour, a canticle of praise to the Lord in the name of all His creatures, and now he implores you to listen to it with devotion."

And they began full of fervour to intone the soul-stirring canticle, concluding thus:

"Praised be my Lord for those who for Thy love
forgive
And weakness bear and tribulation.
Blessed be those who shall in peace endure.
For by the Most High shall they be crowned."

Before the hearers' minds rose up the image of the dying Francis, and in their hearts they felt the inspiration of grace. Scarcely had the brothers finished, than the Podestà, melting into tears, declared himself ready, for the love of Christ and His servant Francis, to pardon not only the Bishop but "even him who would have caused the death of his own father and son."

In his Rule the Saint insists on the peaceful mission of his followers. He gave them the Gospel salutation, "Peace be to this house," as their opening words when they would enter any dwelling:

"When the friars go out in the world, they shall neither quarrel nor dispute nor judge others, but let them be meek, gentle, humble, and modest, speaking courteously to everyone as is becoming. And into whatsoever house they enter they shall first say: Peace be to this house."

Tradition has it that the great Dante, after a stormy life, knocked one evening at the door of a lonely convent in the Appenines. On being asked what he desired, he replied in a single word: "Peace." In many ways Dante was symbolic of his epoch. To a great extent St. Francis brought peace to his age. His contemporaries and immediate successors seem to have realised it. The first known portrait of the Saint is to be seen at Subiaco, not far from Rome, in the spot where St. Benedict passed the first days of his monastic life. The Saint is portrayed standing up with his right hand on his breast and in his left hand a folio bearing the inscription *Pax huic domui*—Peace be to this house.

Miseries of body as well as of soul evoked his sympathy. For the lepers he cherished a special affection. He would embrace them and eat from the self-same dishes from which the lepers ate their food.

Who, thinking of the Franciscan missionaries tending the lepers of the present day will say that the charity inculcated by Francis has died out? In the twentieth century Père Daniel, a Capuchin Franciscan, dying a leper in 1924, after twenty-five years' service to the lepers, testifies to the vital influence of the Franciscan ideal of charitable apostolate.

The Franciscan apostolate was not confined within the borders of Italy. The world was its arena. Out to the four corners of the earth Franciscans went, two by two like the apostles of old. There is scarcely a corner of the earth that has not been sanctified by their feet. As he was the first religious founder explicitly to inculcate the apostolate in general, so Francis was also the first to insert a special chapter on foreign missions in

his Rule. The final chapter is almost entirely devoted to the subject.

This chapter places no strict obligation on the individual Franciscan; it is rather a counsel:

> "Should any friar, moved by Divine inspiration, desire to go among the Saracens or other infidels he shall ask leave to go from his Minister Provincial."

We have but to look at the world's map to see to what extent the Franciscans have spread throughout the whole earth, and to feel that even to this day true Franciscan hearts beat beneath the Franciscan habit.

Francis himself was the first to set the example. Of his different efforts to leave Italy behind him in search of martyrdom there is not one more inspiring than his visit in 1219 to the Holy Land. There is something touching in the picture of the gentle Francis as he stood amidst the crusading army encamped near Damietta in Egypt. Already in 1217 he had sent brother Elias into Syria, and with the defeat of the Crusaders he set out himself to meet the Sultan, Melek-el-Camel. From him he obtained safe conduct through Judæa to Jerusalem in order to visit the tomb of our Saviour. Where the weapons of war failed, the invincible army of Brother Francis conquered. The existing catalogue of the Franciscans in Jerusalem shows that between the years 1217-1333 there were twenty-five Franciscans there. To this day the stay of the Franciscans has been uninterrupted. They still watch over the Holy Places, and more than two thousand martyred friars testify to the tenacity with which they have held to their posts.

In 1220, five Franciscans went to Morocco; they were martyred. Soon after, others followed, evangelising Northern Africa from Morocco to Egypt, passing by Tunis and Lybia, thence descending into Abyssinia and Ethiopia.

Meanwhile Francis returned without having succeeded in his desire for martyrdom. In 1224 he received his special martyrdom of soul and body on the heights of Alverna. At that very moment the Franciscans were landing in England. . .[1]

3. *The Franciscans and Science.*

All true apostolate must look not only to the body and soul but also to the minds of men. One of the highest forms of charity is that intellectual charity which divines, and essays to satisfy, the needs of the mind. Physical distress is so obvious and palpable, as it were, that it evokes our pity, but the deeper poverty of the human spirit seems to pass unknown. That an Order vowed by profession to the service of other men should not rise to the appreciation of the higher needs of the human spirit would be a real anomaly. Yet, because of that real development of the Franciscan

[1] The Franciscans were in Ireland in 1224, if not before that. A Franciscan convent was founded in Youghal, Co. Cork, in 1224. The first date on record, however, is 1232. *Cf. Materials for the History of the Franciscan Province of Ireland* (Vol. IX of British Society of Franciscan Studies) edited by Fitzmaurice, O.F.M., and A. G. Little, 1920, p. 1.

Order towards science and study, some will have it that the Franciscans were untrue to the austere ideal of their Founder. A broad view of Franciscan apostolate will, I think, justify that interest manifested by Franciscans, since the time of St. Francis, in the intellectual life.

It is obvious that the apostolate which St. Francis had before his eyes was the simple apostolate of service to his fellow-men and of preaching. What he emphasised above all was the preaching of example. The life of any friar was to be his greatest sermon. The story goes that Francis went out to preach, accompanied by a novice. Perhaps he wished to give a lesson to the novice, for Francis had a real art for dramatising his injunctions. They walked through the streets, but, instead of having stopped to preach, St. Francis returned home without having uttered a word. "But what about the sermon?" naturally inquired the novice. St. Francis left him to understand that the sermon had been preached by their demeanour.

This preaching by example must always have its place in the Franciscan life. Down through the ages the simple fact that rich men and able men, learned men and doctors, as well as rustics, have worn the simple habit of St. Francis has been a constant sermon to humanity. Their having left all things to follow Christ insured a disinterested service to their fellow-men that has ever evoked the sympathy and good feeling of the people. Because they had no ties of possession, no vested interests, no personal ambitions, they were free to devote themselves to the people in social work of every kind and were always foremost when the crises of public

sickness or other evils menaced the life of the towns wherein they found themselves.

The Fr. Cristoforo of the Capuchin revival, immortalised by Manzoni in his *I Promessi Sposi*, was not one Franciscan, but many. Nor were all the Frati Cristofori, as Fr. Cuthbert points out,[1] popular preachers or even social workers in the ordinary sense. Not infrequently it was some simple lay-brother ever ready to hear the tale of woe, ever willing to pour out the oil of consolation, whose nights were spent in prayer and whose days were passed in begging alms for the sick poor.

The simple words of exhortation and advice that such a humble brother addressed to the many persons who flocked to the friary gate brings one back to the simple preaching of St. Francis. He would stop in the market, mount a little box, perhaps, and speak to the people. Men laid aside their affairs to hear him, for there was wondrous unction in his voice, and the companion who was with the Saint, Brother Giles, would then follow up his father with a few words: "Brethren, what Brother Francis says is true; do ye what he commands."

St. Francis himself knew the futility of preparing learned discourses. He had done that on one occasion and failed—it was before the Cardinals. But when memory failed, he spoke spontaneously from his heart. The Cardinals were impressed. When he came to write his Rule he told the Friars to speak simply, of vices and virtues, of punishment and glory, with brevity.

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[1] *The Capuchins*, Vol. II, pp. 350 ff.

With the formation of the novitiate in 1219, with the coming to the Order of professors and doctors and clerics, it was apparent that the Franciscans must sooner or later embark upon a course of study. The Saint himself was made to see that, if his followers were to live in a Catholic manner, they must find a place in their rule of life for science and study. He is said to have given permission to St. Anthony to teach the brothers. But he took care to add "provided that, like work, study would not interfere with the spirit of prayer and devotion."

There are more important things in the Franciscan life than science and study. That obviously is the first inference from the Saint's words. A second conclusion is that intellectual life cannot be an end in itself for the follower of St. Francis. Those versed in the philosophy of St. Thomas will remember with what enthusiasm he speaks of thought and of intellect as the properly human faculty and of contemplation as the final end of man. But St. Thomas, true follower of Aristotle that he was—true philosopher, I should say—was viewing things in the abstract when he lauded intellectuality and contemplation. In the concrete he knew that in this life there was something greater than knowledge, and that was love.[1] St. Francis was one who ever kept before him the fact that human nature is destined to a supernatural end. He knew that it was love that would carry on men to the vision of God. He never thought of the abstractions of philosophers. All he knew, or cared to know, was that man's life must prove itself by

[1] *Melior est amor Dei quam cognitio*—St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol.*, i, q.82, a.2.

action, and that even knowledge is an instrument, not an end in itself. He was aware, too, that knowledge, not tempered by love, might prove dangerous. So many prided themselves on knowledge in his day, felt so rich in its possession, that he thought he would sacrifice it the better to follow the Lady Poverty in the poverty of an unadorned mind. Not that Francis was unlettered or ignorant. Even humanly speaking he was cultured, and possessed of no mean resources from a mental point of view; but his real knowledge was from above. It could not be said that he was opposed to knowledge as such. This may be inferred from the high respect in which he ever held theologians and "those who minister to us the words of life." He was not even above employing a poet brother to put the finishing touches to his own poetic effusions.

What would St. Francis have thought had somebody suggested that learning as such was an aid, not an obstacle, to sanctity? Is there not something of the philosopher in every Christian who strives to find the unity and ultimate meaning of things in Jesus Christ?

St. Francis wished his friars to work. He could be stern with those who did not work. Mockingly he would call the idler "Brother Fly." But is not study a form of work? St. Bonaventure looked on study in that light and found in it an admirable means of avoiding idleness, which St. Francis himself had described as "the enemy of the soul."

It is true that scientific study, as a form of work, could in certain circumstances be a menace to the spiritual life. So also it could be detrimental to any kind of full human life. Undertaken to parade one's learning,

study is the merest vanity. Indulged in to satisfy the curiosity of a mere "intellectual all in all" without thought for the student's fellow man, study is certainly un-Franciscan. Yet if the Franciscan mode of life is to furnish men with an ideal capable of evoking full human living, it is bound to take cognisance of the particularly human activity of thought. A life that would have no blessing for human thinking as such would seem to be lacking in something; instead of promising a full human life it would tantalise us with the prospect of "une vie manqueé." A life so full as that of St. Francis was in time bound to express itself not only in poetry of word and action, as with Francis himself, not only in preaching by word and example as with his first followers, but also in that high form of intellectual expression which is to be found in the writings of St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Alexander of Hales or the many other Franciscan writers who have added pages to the Christian treasury of intellectual lore. Knowledge is merely life coming to consciousness of itself, and when men had lived the Franciscan life it was inevitable that they should seek to express that life in writing. Was St. Bonaventure less Franciscan for having sought to give in his writings the intellectual expression of the Franciscan life which he lived before he wrote it? The Franciscan spirit did not cease to be itself when it soared up to the high regions of thought. The poetry that seemed naturally to spring up in the Franciscan school was not a more natural expression of the Franciscan spirit than was the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* of St. Bonaventure. The same impulse was at work. Franciscan philosophy was merely Franciscan

poetry grown conscious of itself, and Franciscan life looking at itself in the mirror of its own limpidity. Inevitably also a time would come when the exhortatory form of preaching would no longer suffice for the needs of the apostolate. That was well enough when men had a common faith and needed only to be reminded of obligations which none denied in theory. But when faith itself was attacked, men had to study, and thereby seek a common meeting ground in philosophy. Such needs apart, it was natural for the Franciscan, once he had been initiated into the secrets of theology, to employ his own enthusiasm as a means of discovering new and beautiful things about faith itself. The Franciscans began by being indebted to theology, but in time theology became indebted to them.

The system of St. Bonaventure, with its emphasis on Jesus Christ, the Teacher, with its realistic appreciation of man's actual destiny, provides in itself the most fitting answer to those who see an opposition between Franciscanism and science. The philosophy of St. Bonaventure is a strong plea for knowledge transfused by love: *non est perfecta cognitio sine dilectione.* Whereas St. Thomas welcomed Aristotle and taught a clear distinction of faith and reason, of theology and philosophy, St. Bonaventure knowingly rejected Aristotle. He was thoroughly Franciscan in that, for, like St. Francis, knowledge for him was subordinate to love; and in the present supernatural order there is only one authority, Christ.

There is a touching story of one of the first companions of St. Francis, Brother Giles, which illustrates the Franciscan difficulty about science. Brother Giles

was a very near approach to the ideal Friar Minor. He was always troubled in his mind about this question of learning. He saw the Brothers go up to the different universities, and at Paris he knew that the great Brother Bonaventure was actually teaching. In his heart of hearts he must have said: "Paris, Paris, thou art destroying Assisi." One day all his fears found expression. He was old. St. Francis was long since dead, and St. Bonaventure was the head of the Order. Brother Giles appeared before him. His first question has a certain shrewdness about it. "Father, can we ignorant, unlettered men be saved?" "Certainly," replied St. Bonaventure kindly. "Can one who is not book-learned [here he was voicing the real question] love God as much as one who is?" The saint's reply was striking: "Brother, any old pious woman is in a position to love God even more than a master in theology." The old man's doubts were settled. It is said that he ran down to the monastery walls and there shouted to the passers-by: "Hear this, all of you. An old woman who never has learned anything, and who cannot read, can love God more than Brother Bonaventure." The great university man had justified the humble Brother Giles. The lettered and unlettered were linked together in the common school of love. Heroism in sanctity, great and striking manifestation of the inner life of the spirit,—such things spring from love, "If you would truly know how these things come to pass," says St. Bonaventure, "ask it of desire, not of intellect; of the ardours of prayer, not of the teaching of the schools." [1] "Let us die then to ourselves, let us

[1] *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, cap. 7.

enter into the mysteries of the darkness; let us implore silence on anxiety, on desire, on the phantoms of the senses, and in the train of Christ Crucified, let us pass from the world to our Father."

St. Francis himself might well have said such things. With St. Bonaventure, science is still subordinate to devotion. But he had greater difficulties in his time than had St. Francis when he was legislating for the spiritual life of his early brethren. The simple life, exemplified in the horarium for the hermitages, could never satisfy the multitude. We can never expect any multitude constantly to live on heroic heights. The Breviary and the Gospels sufficed for the primitive Franciscans who were so full of the divine enthusiasm of love. These first heroes of the seraphic ideal had little need of that spiritual nourishment which more ordinary mortals need to enrich their spiritual sense. St. Francis himself needed no books, he said, for he knew the Gospel by heart. But experience shows that ordinarily it is through spiritual reading that men prepare their meditation and prayer.

The early Franciscans had their Divine Office, and found in it the hidden manna for mental prayer. With the growth of the Friars the recital of the Office in common became an important function. Hours of prayer had to be regulated. A time for mental prayer had to be set apart. St. Bonaventure was very anxious to model the Franciscan life on the liturgical life of the Church itself. He preferred large convents, for the simple reason that the liturgy could be more properly observed therein. But all this meant a leaving behind of the spontaneous and somewhat nomadic life of early

Franciscanism. It meant a certain legalism and a necessary ordering of the Franciscan life down to small details.

While St. Bonaventure appealed to many arguments to show that study must have a part in the Franciscan life, for himself he was quite content with that development which would raise study to the rank of a necessary instrument for action. He had a broad and embracing vision wherein he saw that the development of the Franciscan Order was just a recurrence of that original development within the Church itself. The Church which taught through the mouths of the great Doctors was none other than the Church of the simple unlettered Apostles. The life and spirit of the Church is ever the same: its manifestations only differ.

So it is with the Franciscan Order. The little nucleus of the Umbrian valley has become a great living organism. But it is the same vital principle that moulds the whole. The sublime doctrines delivered by a St. Bonaventure from his university chair in Paris are vitalised by the same breath and spirit as that which gave life to the exhortations of the first Franciscans; and when, later, we find that men would leave their work in the fields to listen to the learned discourses of a Laurence of Brindisi we feel that the Franciscan spirit is not tied down rigidly to any form of address or preaching. It is large and penetrating like the spirit of the Church. It may be embodied in the simple lay-brother who washes up the dishes in the kitchen, or in the preacher around whose pulpit crowds will gather, in the Friar who tends the sick or in the Franciscan who enters the university. But if it is true and sincere it will be

discernible in its embodiments and manifestations, there will be a common family-likeness that will set men thinking of the Father of all Franciscans, the humble little Saint Francis of Assisi.

IV

SUMMARY

1. *Retrospect.*

As a concluding word to the present essay I should like to say that my aim has been simply to give a short account of St. Francis and of his contribution to the Christian spirituality of the Church. I shall be happy if I have succeeded in putting him before the reader as an authentic exponent of the Church's mind, and if I have helped to unite the Franciscans as we know them to their Founder.

The personal rendering of Christian holiness by St. Francis is very obvious both from his own life and from the Rule he wrote for his followers. But there is nothing in either which cuts him off in any radical manner from the Church or from the Franciscans. No doubt, his personal life of sanctity, with its heroism and its humanism, towers above the Rule as a compelling force of inspiration. Yet, to observe the Rule is to live the Franciscan life, and be a true authentic follower of St. Francis.

The Rule legislates simply for a living of the Gospel. It indicates that the integral Franciscan ideal is simply Jesus Christ, Christ in His contemplative life of prayer, and Christ in His apostolate of action. Wisely, St. Francis made all things, apostolate included, sub-

servient to the life of prayer. But that was the only radical condition he placed upon his apostolate, which, like that of Christ, was co-extensive with humanity. In that already he showed a certain originality as a religious founder. The evangelisation of the pagan, however, he left to the free choice of his followers, presuming no doubt that at heart every Franciscan would be an apostle of prayer. Those who went forth because they felt called to do so would be neither more nor less Franciscan than those who felt called merely to observe the Rule in the midst of Christians.

Just as Francis himself was a product of the Church, so he wished Franciscans to be the humblest servants and most obedient sons of the Church. In everything they were to be *minores*. They were commanded to obey the Church, to love and respect her hierarchy down to the simplest priest, in whom the Franciscan is enjoined to see no sin. The Franciscans were to be mere helpers in the Church, ready to uphold her, like Francis in the Pope's dream, in the very darkest corner of her foundations.

St. Francis gave his friars to the Church. It has been my aim to show that it is within the Church's power to give men to Francis, to save his followers for Francis, to ensure the continuance of the Franciscan tradition. That has been the Church's rôle in the past. She saved Franciscanism for the world. She is, and has always been, the living bond between Franciscans and St. Francis.

2. *Franciscan Influences.*

In truth the works of the Franciscans declare their authentic lineage: "by their fruits you shall know them." The sanctity that has marked the Franciscans of the different branches is eloquent testimony. The Church has become indebted not only to Francis himself but to others who have borne the Franciscan name. She glories in her indebtedness, knowing that first the Franciscans were indebted to her. There is nothing more gratifying to the Church than to see her hidden sanctity bodied forth in lives that she herself acknowledges as heroic. How many Franciscans has she not crowned with the nimbus of her officially recognised sanctity? Not only St. Francis himself is registered on her catalogue, but a host of others whose names have become household words: St. Anthony of Padua, St. Bonaventure, St. Paschal Baylon. The list of Franciscan Saints of the First Order alone, not to mention the five Saints and twenty-two Blessed of the Second Order of Poor Clares, or the thirty-five Saints and sixty-five Blessed of the Third Order, is long and imposing. And what is even better, the glories of Franciscan sanctity are not of the past merely; the list is not yet closed. Of the twenty-nine saints of every rank and class canonised by the Church in the nineteenth century, fifteen were Franciscans; of the sixty-three beatified, eighteen were Franciscans, of the two hundred and eighteen causes introduced sixty-three were Franciscan. Only four years ago the present Holy Father beatified the nineteen Franciscan martyrs of Damascus. Only a few months ago he beatified a simple Capuchin lay-

brother. At the present moment there are upwards of two hundred Franciscan Causes before the Holy See.

By their apostolic and missionary labours the Franciscans have extended the Church's empire far and wide. This missionary zeal and activity is another bond that unites Franciscans to St. Francis, who without exaggeration might be called the founder of foreign missions. We have already seen them follow Francis to the Holy Land; in 1434, Pope Eugenius IV definitely entrusted to the Franciscan Observants the guardianship of the Holy Places which they hold to the present day. Every century marks the acquisition of new territory: already in the thirteenth century they were all over Europe, from the south up to Russia and Scandinavia; they had actually gone to the far East; and with the discovery of America Fr. John Perez, a Franciscan friend of Columbus, and two companions were the first apostles of the New World. At the present moment there are roughly two thousand Franciscans, apart from the Capuchins and Conventuals, who are engaged in evangelising pagan nations.

The first Capuchin Franciscans who set out on missionary work were the Spanish Capuchin, John Zuaze, and John of Troia.[1] They left for Egypt and the Holy Land in 1549, and died in prison in 1551. Before the stable organisation of the missions in 1662, the Capuchins exercised their ministry amongst the Christian slaves in Algeria and Tunis. At the present day there are upwards of twelve hundred Capuchin Franciscans on the missions: in Abyssinia, in Brazil, in the Congo,

[1] *Cf. Liber Memorialis Capuccinorum* (1528-1928), Romæ, 1928, pp. 31ff.

in the Dutch possessions of the Levant, in India, in Africa and in China.

The work of the Franciscans at home among Christians is characterised by a sympathetic appreciation of the popular devotional needs of their day. The Franciscans have always somehow appeared as men of their time, at once moulding and being moulded by their surroundings. The pulse of Franciscan piety beats in harmony with the great pulse of Catholic life, and it is but natural that the Friars should have sensed the popular needs of their periods. We find that they fostered and propagated those devotions in the Church which appeal most strongly to the people: Franciscan devotion to the Passion of our Lord inspired St. Leonard of Port Maurice to preach the Stations of the Cross; St. Paschal Baylon rose up to illustrate Franciscan devotion to the Holy Eucharist; St. Bernardine of Siena preached devotion to the Holy Name; the Capuchin Franciscans popularised the devotion of the *Quarant' Ore*. In all this they were merely true to the piety of their Founder, who himself popularised the devotion to the Crib of Bethlehem; but in one particular devotion they were particularly faithful to their Founder's wishes—devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Franciscan Order. "The Blessed Virgin," Francis had said, "is justly honoured so greatly, because she bore the Lord in her most holy womb." If Jesus Christ was for him King and Lord of all the world, Mary was "Mistress of the world." The Virgin Mary, like her Son, had lent dignity to poverty, and Francis loved poverty, so loved it, indeed, that he made a Lady

of it. But a son of Francis, St. Bonaventure, identified the Lady Poverty with the Virgin herself.

The tradition of devotion to Mary issuing from the Portiuncula, which Francis had consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, remained unbroken. No sooner was the lyre from which St. Francis had struck forth the praises of the Virgin Mother laid aside, than it was immediately taken up and handed down from hand to hand. In a long Latin poem St. Bonaventure applies to Mary, with great dexterity, the choicest epithets from Scripture, all those wondrous epithets that minds inspired by God had invented in the attempt to express her beauty. It was not enough to praise her in the Latin tongue; soon a Franciscan rose up to sing of Mary in the Italian of the people. When the Angelus first rang out from Franciscan belfries it was an appeal to the people to lift up their voices in praise of Mary. Jacopone da Todi wrote popular hymns wherein to express such praise. The same Jacopone was also to add something in the simplest Latin to the great liturgical treasury of the Church; it was a song of sorrow, it was a plaint of sadness which scarcely knows an equal for simplicity and grandeur—the *Stabat Mater*. It is less generally known that he wrote a second *Stabat Mater* for Mary's presence in Bethlehem. The song of sorrow, like his *Dies Irae*, is preserved; the song of joy is all but forgotten.

The Franciscans were also ardent defenders and exponents of the Catholic Faith. They began by being humble pupils, but in time they contributed their share to the common patrimony of Christian wisdom. The Franciscan, Alexander of Hales, was looked upon by

the great Dominican theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, as "master of those who know in the realm of theology." The place of St. Bonaventure in the series of the Church's mystical writers is assured; the Chancellor of Paris, John Gerson, pointed to him in his day as the surest master in the spiritual life. But St. Bonaventure put forward these in the pure domain of speculative theology, particularly on the power of the Pope in the spiritual realm, which have scarcely received the attention they deserve. The Venerable John Duns Scotus, by his brilliant defence of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, has laid all Christendom under a debt of gratitude to him. On 4th July, 1904, his Eminence the late Cardinal Merry del Val, then Secretary of State, sent a letter to Father Pauwels, O.F.M., from which I quote the following:

> "To write the history of these events which finally induced Pius IX, of immortal memory, to proclaim, in due time, this dogma, so dear to our hearts, is to place in prominent relief a glory and an honour of the Franciscan Order. Your Order from its cradle has, according to the directions of St. Francis himself, been nourished with devotion to the Immaculate Virgin; later on, treading in the footsteps of Venerable John Duns Scotus, it propagated this truth with so much zeal and enthusiasm that it carried the doctrine of Mary's non-forfeiture of grace as on the crest of a wave to its ultimate triumph, gaining thereby a special title to her protection." [1]

[1] *Cf. Irish Ecclesiastical Record,* 1904, p. 481.

St. John Capistran preached against the Hussites and converted some of them. Others, like St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen (1622), the martyrs of Gorcum, and the Blessed John Forest and his companions (1533), sealed their faith with their blood.

With the rise of the Capuchin Franciscans in the sixteenth century we are in presence of a real reform movement within the Church itself. The vitality of Christian thought becomes strikingly evident, and we may gather some idea of what the normal development of the Catholic reform movement might have been, "if the menace of the Protestant revolt had not turned the Catholic world into an armed defensive camp." [1]

When Father Cuthbert began to study the Capuchin Humanists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he was not less surprised and bewildered by the wealth of their wisdom than was Henri Bremond by their literary and religious value.[2] "Of Yves de Paris," writes Father Cuthbert, "I hardly dare venture a judgment, for I have not yet lost the astonishment at his profundity of thought and sheer beauty of style which held me the day I first opened a book of this almost forgotten writer. It was *La Théology Naturelle.*" [3] The chapter entitled, "The Capuchins make Literature," reads like a romance. When Father Cuthbert traces the Capuchin lineage back to the followers of most high poverty he is making a bold claim for the Capuchin family. With St. Francis poverty had taken on a tran-

[1] Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., *The Capuchins*, Vol. 1, Preface.
[2] H. Bremond, *Histoire litteraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Vol. I, pp. 121ff.
[3] *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 414.

scendental import. The Lady Poverty was for him what Beatrice was for Dante. It was she who flung open the windows of his soul on visions illimitable. And as long as the Franciscan soul kept itself free and untrammelled, it was living, full of the spontaneity of life, and capable of bringing heaven to earth.

With that spontaneity of vital and living force, surprises were in store. And the greatest surprise of all, looking at the historical growth of the Capuchins, was the intellectual and literary development that arose in their midst. The mystical tradition is taken up, and from the first work in 1536, which deals with the soul's ascent to God, the mystical note is present. The influence of St. Bonaventure is very marked. The theme of love and of loving action, as opposed to mere speculation, is stressed. We see it in *The Secret Paths of Divine Love*, written by Constantine of Barabaçon as well as in *The Rule of Perfection*, of Benet Canfield, and *The Kingdom of God in the Soul*, by Father John-Evangelist of Bois-le-Duc.[1]

[1] This work of John-Evangelist has just been published by Sheed & Ward. It forms the first of the "Capuchin Classics" under the general editorship of Father Cuthbert. We have already referred to the excellent little book by the seventeenth-century Franciscan, Brother Boniface Maes. This work of Brother Boniface has been published under the title *Franciscan Mysticism* by Sheed & Ward. The translator is Dom Basil Whelan, O.S.B. Though published independently of the "Caritas Series," it reminds us of the work done by the Franciscans to revive their classical authors. It is encouraging thus to see Franciscans striving to discharge their debt to the Franciscan tradition. The "Capuchin Classics" in England, and the "Caritas Series" in Belgium and France, will do much towards rescuing Franciscan writers from unmerited oblivion.

Of preachers there were many in the Capuchin movement, and Father Cuthbert speaks with enthusiasm of their printed sermons. But the movement was not devoid of philosophers either. Here again, the Bonaventuran influence is marked, though there are certain traces of the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas. Such a philosopher as Valeriano Magno[1] deserves the attention of students interested in the history of philosophic thought. The writer has yet to appear who will synthesise Franciscan philosophy as a whole, and if we may judge of the interest for present-day thought, of St. Augustine and of philosophies of Action, such as that of Maurice Blondel, in France, the student who will give to the world a Franciscan synthesis is destined to command the attention of the modern mind.

These great writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were forgotten during the eighteenth century. The great spiritual and literary revival of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was followed by a long period of apparent torpor. It was as if the human spirit were tired. With the great revival of recent years the Franciscans generally have been working arduously. I can merely here touch on their labours. The Franciscans of St. Bonaventure's college at Quarrachi have given us critical editions of the works of Alexander of Hales, of St. Bonaventure, and of the early chronicles of the Order under the title *Analecta Franciscana*. At present they are engaged on a critical edition of the works of Duns Scotus. Since 1908 they have been editing the

[1] *Cf.* Fr. Cuthbert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 312f.

Archivium Franciscanum Historicum, which is an invaluable source-book for all things Franciscan.

In 1899, the Capuchin Franciscans of the Province of Paris founded a review, the *Etudes Franciscaines*, which has deserved mention as one of the outstanding periodicals of the Scholastic revival. In 1908 the *Revista de Estudios Franciscanos* was started by the Capuchins of the Barcelona province. It still continues under a new name, *Estudis Franciscans*, and its editors have published large volumes to commemorate St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as the fourth centenary of the founding of the Capuchins; [1] they are at present engaged on a centenary record to celebrate St. Augustine. In the United States the Friars have founded a yearly Educational Conference, the results of which are published yearly in book form.

In 1926 the Capuchins took over a college at Assisi with the object of working on similar lines to their brethren at Quarrachi. While taking for the object of their researches the whole field of Franciscan history and literature, they will concentrate particularly on the history and writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A quarterly review, *Collectanea Franciscana* will deal in a critico-historical way with Franciscan literature and history.

In this way, it will be seen, the injunction of St. Francis in his Rule that the Friars should work is being obeyed, with consequent good to themselves and to the Church of which they are humble and obedient sons, like their Father, the Poverello of Assisi.

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[1] *Franciscalia*, Barcelona, 1928.

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